

From Scotland with love: the story of Balfours

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INTRODUCTION

Home of the Frog Cake

Here in Australia, we have a propensity for building Big Things, often in celebration of foodstuffs. Scattered around the country are the Big Banana, the Big Mandarin, the Big Potato, the Big Lobster and many more. However, if Adelaide were to erect a giant monument to a favourite food, surely it would be the Big Balfours Frog Cake.

In fact, just such a monument was suggested in jest by ABC radio personality Peter Goers when the city was considering ways to enhance its central park, Victoria Square. And In 2009, Adelaideans were invited to believe that a new football stadium was planned in a design that paid homage to the South Australian culinary favourite. However, the date of the article in *The Advertiser* was April the first.

Although the careful reader soon realised that the “Frog Dome” was not to be, it seemed that for the frog cake anything was possible. Implanted in the local psyche since the 1920s, it was officially declared a South Australian icon by the National Trust in 2004.

But there’s a lot more to Balfours than the frog cake. The company is one of Australia’s oldest food manufacturers, tracing its origins back to 1853, just 17 years after Adelaide’s founding. Generations of South Australians have had their Balfours favourites, from Scotch pies and Albert biscuits in the mid-19th century to square pies, chocolate donuts and custard tarts today.

This is the story of a family business that began with one small shop, opened by a Scottish baker in Adelaide’s rough and ready colonial days. Today, 165 years later, the company is a sophisticated operation, with factories in Sydney and Adelaide producing hundreds of products: pies, pastries, muffins, crumpets, cakes, donuts, croissants...the list goes on. Yes, Balfours has changed with the times. But the company remains an integral part of South Australia’s – and Australia’s – food history.

CHAPTER 1

Ship Biscuits, Rusks and Routs

The year was 1852. On a midsummer day in Leith, the port of Edinburgh, baker James Calder and his wife Margaret Balfour boarded the barque *Collooney*, bound for Australia. It was a long journey, perhaps too long, because although their original destination was Melbourne the Calders decided to disembark in Adelaide. And that's where the Balfours story begins. It's the story of an enterprise that has maintained the finest traditions of baking for more than 165 years.

James Calder was born in Edinburgh in 1818, into an age of turmoil. The industrial revolution was changing the way people lived and worked. Manual labourers in rural areas were seeing their jobs disappear as new machines took their place, and people flocked to the cities to seek out new jobs in factories. Edinburgh, like other cities, was becoming increasingly crowded and employment harder to find. But, as always, people needed to eat. And bread was the staple that sustained them.

So James served his apprenticeship and became a baker. It wasn't an easy life. Back then, bakers worked 14 to 19-hour days – and those 'days' started at 11pm. If you were lucky, you could sleep for a couple of hours in the early morning, while the dough was rising. It was hard, physical work in oppressively hot conditions and it took its toll: statistics show that bakers in Britain rarely lived past the age of 42.

Despite that, it was an honourable trade and one with a long history. Not for nothing was Scotland called "the great nursery of bakers". The Incorporation of Baxters (or bakers) of Edinburgh, one of the city's 15 trade guilds, traced its origins back at least as far as the 1400s. The Scottish bakers weren't just famous for their bread, but for their scones, pancakes, fruit cakes, oatcakes and shortbread. And, increasingly, biscuits.

By the 1830s and '40s, as James was mastering his craft, baking in Scotland was being transformed from a small, local enterprise to one with greater commercial possibilities. Global trade was increasing, commodities like sugar were becoming cheaper and new technology was improving ovens and bakery equipment. In the 1840s, the invention of baking powder – that magical additive that made cakes rise without yeast – opened up a host of new possibilities.

It seems James Calder was successful in his trade. In 1844, at just 26 years of age, he took over William Thorburn's bakery in Shrub Place, just off the main road connecting the Old Town of Edinburgh to the port of Leith. Within a few years he had moved his business to new premises closer to the port and by 1851 was the proprietor of two bakeries in the area, including a shop in one of Leith's most fashionable streets.

It's safe to assume that he had help in running these businesses from his wife, Margaret. James Calder and Margaret Balfour had been married in St Cuthbert's church, in the shadow of Edinburgh's famous castle, in 1843. We know little about Margaret, except that

she and James remained childless after nearly nine years of marriage. Perhaps this lack of family responsibilities contributed to the couple's decision to sell their Edinburgh businesses and seek their fortunes in Australia.

Was it the lure of the goldfields that attracted them? The fact that their original destination was Melbourne makes it likely. In 1851, the discovery of gold at Clunes and later Ballarat in Victoria attracted adventurous spirits from across the world. Ship-owners could scarcely cope with the numbers clamoring for passage and ships changed hands for high prices as entrepreneurs sought to profit from the fortune-hunters.

James and Margaret gained passage on the barque *Collooney*, built in Aberdeen ten years before. A wooden sailing ship just 37 metres long and 6.7 metres from side to side, the *Collooney* would have offered far-from-luxurious quarters. The Calders didn't even have a cabin to themselves. Passenger lists of the day indicate that they must have been either 'intermediate' or 'steerage' passengers.

Although we have no account of their journey, we have, perhaps, some idea of what the couple took with them. An *Immigrant's Guide to Australia*, published around the same time suggested that a married couple required:

...for the wife: three cotton dresses, one pair stays, four petticoats, sixteen chemises, two flannel petticoats, twelve pairs cotton stockings, four pairs black worsted ditto, six night dresses and caps, six pocket-handkerchiefs, four handkerchiefs for the neck, six caps, two bonnets, cloak and shawl, one pair boots, two pairs shoes, and eight towels.

A similarly exhaustive list of clothing was supplied for the husband because, the guide pointed out, with strict water rationing "it is not possible to wash on the voyage". The immigrants also needed to provide themselves with a mattress and bedding, knives and forks, a coffee pot, wash-bowl and soap.

The *Collooney* sailed from Scotland in late July, but it was December before she berthed in Adelaide. For more than four months, the Calders saw little but endless stretches of ocean and ate a monotonous diet of ship biscuit, salt meat and preserved vegetables, perhaps enlivened by a little cheese, mustard or pickles. Contemporary accounts tell of passengers growing weary of chess, backgammon, books and cards, of long days becalmed in the Bay of Biscay and of gales, storms, extreme heat and extreme cold. It's little wonder that James and Margaret decided to end their voyage in South Australia and to seek their fortunes in trade rather than at the diggings.

The Adelaide they encountered in 1852 stood in stark contrast to the Edinburgh they left behind. Instead of a crowded, ancient city of close to 200,000 souls they found a town established just 16 years before, a town of less than 20,000 people. The streets, though wide, were so muddy that ladies frequently lost their shoes while crossing the road. The Calders' first journey from the port no doubt provided a rude introduction to their new home. "The road is very wide, but full of holes, only a rough mud causeway over a huge marsh," wrote one new arrival.

With the gold fever of 1851 Adelaide had become a virtual ghost town, as able-bodied men deserted their regular occupations to follow their dreams. There was an acute shortage of labour. Windows and doorways of homes were bricked up and carried notices saying "Gone to the diggings". Streets were almost deserted and shops lay vacant. One humourist even suggested that the South Australian Government should place a "South Australia – TO LET" sign on an off-shore island to attract passengers on passing ships.

By the end of 1852, though, the lucky ones were returning with their spoils and the city was beginning to recover from the exodus. South Australia was profiting from its own rich copper mines while the colony's wheat farmers and millers enjoyed high prices for the foodstuffs they exported to feed hungry gold-seekers. Despite the primitive sanitation and the mud, Adelaide had schools and churches, mechanics institutes, theatres, newspapers and even a Botanic Garden.

It was a town poised to grow and James Calder was determined to grow with it. He wasted no time acquiring premises at 130 Rundle Street in central Adelaide where he set up as a bread and biscuit maker. He already had competition. Bakers were among the first to establish their businesses in Adelaide, initially relying on flour imported from Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) or even from Chile. By 1840 there were at least 14 Master Bakers operating in Adelaide and their offering had expanded from the basic ship biscuits and bread to include a wide range of fancier cakes, biscuits and pies. An advertisement from the time, headed "ADELAIDE ADVANCE!!" offered "Breakfast Rolls every morning at 8 o'clock, and Tea Cakes every afternoon; plain and fancy Biscuits, Buns and Cakes of all descriptions, fresh daily."

That the Calders built an enduring business is a credit to their business acumen and the quality of their products. Fortunately, by the 1850s they had access to high quality, home-grown ingredients. Around 20 per cent of South Australian families were involved in growing grain and local millers were winning world-wide praise for the quality of their flour. By 1855, South Australia's population had grown to more than 66,000 and the colony was becoming more prosperous, helped by the expansion of the pastoral and mining industries and the opening up of trade along the River Murray.

This increasing prosperity benefited the Calders' business. In 1855, their bakery was listed for the first time in the local business directory and James, realising the power of advertising, began to promote his wares. He started with the basics. "RUSKS. RUSKS. RUSKS." the headline announced. The advertisement continued politely:

"The undersigned begs respectfully to call attention to his large stock of excellent and nutritious ARROWROOT RUSKS, very suitable for Invalids and Children, and prepared expressly for the ensuing hot season. Sold in one pound packets, at 1s. 4d. per pound, by JAMES CALDER, Wholesale Confectioner and Biscuit Baker."

Further advertisements advised that Calder was importing a large variety of the finest Scotch Confectionery. However, by 1857 the confectionery seemed to be taking a lesser role and James was calling his business Calder's Fancy Bread and Biscuit Bakery. At this time, he

took over a second property at 43 Rundle Street. This was initially a retail shop, while baking operations continued to take place at 130 Rundle.

The Calders must have seen bright prospects for life in their new country, because they were soon joined by other family members including Margaret's sister Janet, James's brother William and his family, and, in 1859, Margaret's nephew John Balfour. John arrived from Scotland at the age of 14, along with more of the Balfour tribe, and became an apprentice in the bakery. It was John who would put the Balfour name on the door – a name that was destined to become Adelaide's iconic baking brand.

The business continued to expand, and soon the Calders added to their range. By 1864 they were offering not only "a first-rate Loaf of Bread and Biscuits of unequalled quality" but wedding cakes made to order. The intricately ornamented white wedding cake had gained popularity since Queen Victoria's marriage in 1840 and Calder's was happy to supply one "unsurpassed for Ornament and Quality" for a trifling five guineas. Smaller wedding and Christening cakes were always in stock.

A newspaper story of the 1860s tells us a little about the Calders' success in those early years: "Being a thoroughly practical man [James] was soon able to produce an article equal in quality and considerably cheaper in price than the imported; but it was not till some years afterwards that by the application of machinery he was enabled to turn out a much larger quantity than could ever be done by mere hand labour."

Canny Scot that he was, James Calder could see that the future of baking lay in mechanisation. He had his eye on the wholesale biscuit trade, which required increased production. So, in 1865, he travelled back to Edinburgh to purchase machines to handle the kneading, rolling and cutting operations. The cutting machine, from Messrs. A. & G. Slight's, of Edinburgh, was "constructed on the most recent and improved principles".

James installed these machines in his premises at 130 Rundle Street. There, four men and an apprentice worked from five in the morning until five at night which, the *South Australian Register* remarked, was "considerably more reasonable than the hours at which the men are required on most bakeries to be at work". James believed that the shorter hours benefited both his employees and his business, as the men were fresher for having had a good night's rest.

In 1866, James was promoting his business as a "machine biscuit factory". The new machinery allowed him to make his usual excellent quality of biscuits in greater variety and, he claimed, "at a much lower price, especially the small fancy biscuits." It remained only to add a more powerful driving force: steam. Despite the limited space – the factory at 130 Rundle Street was just 40 feet (12.2 metres) long and 12 feet (3.7 metres) wide – a steam engine was finally installed and the first Calder's Steam Biscuit Factory was in operation.

The Basic Biscuit

The word 'biscuit' literally means twice-cooked. Originally, biscuits were popular as provisions for travellers and, to make them last, they were cooked until they became very dry and hard. Bakers who set up their businesses in sea ports profited from supplying biscuits to visiting ships. Ship biscuits were often cooked as many as four times. Known as 'hard tack', they could only be eaten by being dipped in water, soup or other liquids to soften them. 'Captain' biscuits were a finer grade of ship biscuit and gave rise to the water crackers available today.

Cracknels and Rout Biscuits

We know from newspaper reports that cracknels and rout biscuits were among the varieties James Calder was making in his bakery at 130 Rundle Street in the 1860s. Cracknels were a form of hard biscuit thought to have originated in Britain's Isle of Wight. The biscuits were boiled before baking and they were made with eggs instead of water or milk, which made them light and, supposedly, easy to digest.

"Rout" was a term used to describe a convivial gathering, and rout biscuits – presumably for consuming at such gatherings – were fancy sweet biscuits. In James Calder's bakery they were made by pushing dough through holes in a brass plate onto the baking trays.

CHAPTER 2

The Royal Digestive

While James Calder was still in the process of converting his factory to steam, an event occurred that sent Australian society into a frenzy: the First Royal Visit. In 1867 Queen Victoria's son, Prince Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh, arrived for a tour that took in all of the eastern colonies. Perth, to the Western Australians' disappointment and to the smug amusement of the other colonies, missed out.

Adelaide was Prince Alfred's first port of call. He was greeted by massive crowds, huge portraits adorning the buildings and 40,000 gas lights illuminating the city's public offices. During the three weeks the Prince spent in Adelaide he was treated to balls, race meetings, a torch-light procession, a shooting expedition and, not the least of the entertainments, a visit to the South Australian Agricultural and Horticultural Society's Exhibition (what we know today as the Royal Adelaide Show). There he was prevailed upon to present the medals, including a Silver Medal in the biscuit category won by James Calder.

Even more significant for Calder was the Royal Warrant the firm secured to supply biscuits to the Prince and his party. For the next ten years, James made the most of this royal connection, promoting himself as "Biscuit-Maker to H.R.H. the Duke of Edinburgh". The Prince evidently enjoyed his biscuits and his visit to Adelaide, saying in a letter to the local press "I have noticed in Adelaide an absence of the poor and rowdy class, so numerous elsewhere'. His comment no doubt had the city congratulating itself on having remained a respectable, God-fearing, convict-free society.

Sadly, the rest of Prince Alfred's Australian tour was marred by episodes of tragedy and farce. A planned public banquet in Melbourne turned into a riot as a crowd of 40,000 people fought for food and drink meant to serve just 10,000. A ball at Bendigo's new Alfred Hall was cancelled when the building burned to the ground. And in Sydney, the Prince was shot by a crazed Irishman and was lucky to survive.

While the Royal Warrant may have boosted Calder's sales, an event earlier in 1867 had a more far-reaching effect on the business that was to become Balfours. On New Year's Day Margaret's nephew, John Balfour, married Elizabeth McDonald and the couple moved into rooms above the shop at 43 Rundle Street. Thirty years later, Elizabeth was to become the driving force behind Adelaide's iconic Balfour's cafés.

Meanwhile, James continued with the improvements to his bakery and by 1869 his machines were steam-driven. We can only guess at the range of plain and fancy baked goods he produced at 130 Rundle Street. His advertising, though, had a distinctly therapeutic focus, even claiming credit for the proper functioning of the royal digestive system:

James Calder, Biscuit Baker, begs to intimate to gentlemen following sedentary occupations, especially, and the public generally, that he has succeeded in making what he considers to be a first-class DIGESTIVE BISCUIT, a case of which he had the honor to make, with other

goods, for the use of his Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh, on his departure from Adelaide.

Digestive biscuits were invented in Scotland in the 1830s and these early recipes most likely included extract of malt or malted barley flour, which helped to pre-digest some of the starches in the wheat flour. Later recipes for 'Digestives' contained sodium bicarbonate, a substance that was often taken as a remedy for stomach upsets. Although this was unlikely to be effective in a cooked product it proved to be an excellent marketing idea. Today, Digestives (with or without the addition of chocolate) remain the most popular biscuits in Britain.

If Calder's Digestive Biscuits failed to do the trick, though, there was yet another miracle ingredient to treat your indigestion and/or flatulence: charcoal. Charcoal biscuits contained powdered willow charcoal mixed into the dough with sugar, butter and eggs. Calder's Charcoal Biscuits proved to be an enduring item in the range and featured prominently in a display at the Adelaide International Jubilee Exhibition in Adelaide in 1887. Another staple product for Calder was Biscuit Powder, promoted as food for infants.

It seems the "gentlemen in sedentary occupations" as well as the general public took to Calder's biscuits. So much so that the factory in Rundle Street soon proved too small to cope with the demand. The only option was to move. Plans were made for a new building close by in Twin Street and by 1873 the City Steam Biscuit Factory was in operation.

The South Australian Register was full of praise for the new establishment. In a feature on South Australian industries it gave a detailed description of the factory and its machinery.

"The buildings consist of a large machine-room 70 x 40, an engine-room in which is a neat little four horse-power vertical engine, a flour store, and a packing-room 40 x 23, in which the crisp delicacies are seen piled up in great quantities and of every sort and size, from the hard useful ship bread to the thinnest wafer or pretty confectionary biscuit."

The article went on to describe the kneader, the rollers, the cutter, the three coal-burning ovens and the biscuit kiln. It concluded:

Mr. Calder ... has made himself a name for his excellent wedding, pound, currant, sponge, seed, tea, and other cakes. The demand for the colonial made biscuits and cakes is now so brisk that the proprietor finds great difficulty in keeping his customers supplied. He now employs five men and four apprentices, which is the largest number he can find room for in his present premises.

James continued to expand his range, always conscious of the need to keep up with the times. He promised to introduce any new biscuit that was proving popular in either London or Melbourne. Among these was the Albert Biscuit, a spiced sweet biscuit containing almonds and candied citrus peel. Devised by Charles Francatelli, one of the Victorian era's most celebrated chefs, Albert Biscuits were said to be a favourite of Queen Victoria.

It was a good time to be in business in Adelaide. The 1870s were prosperous years. The city now had gas lighting and a reliable supply of clean water. The South Australian copper mines were making their owners wealthy, grand homes were established in the city and

surrounding suburbs, and good rainfalls produced bumper harvests. In 1872 the overland telegraph link from Port Augusta to Darwin was completed and an undersea cable to Java connected Australia to the world.

But prosperity had its challenges. James Calder, now in his sixties, decided he needed help to manage his expanding business. In 1877, he announced that he was making John Balfour a partner and that the company would change its name to Calder & Balfour. Five years later James's health had declined and he was forced to retire from the firm, leaving John Balfour as the manager.

Under John's direction the company continued to expand its wholesale business, delivering biscuits to country areas and appointing interstate agents. Calder & Balfour goods were despatched to shops and hotels by road and, as South Australia's railways expanded, by rail. But John kept a strict eye on the cash flow - all country orders had to be paid for in advance.

One of the factors that helped boost the company's business was the growing fashion for taking afternoon tea. This was a comparatively recent phenomenon, taking hold in England in the 1860s and soon becoming all the rage in Australia. We had long been great tea drinkers. Commenting on town life in Australia, Adelaide journalist Richard Twopenny wrote in 1883 that "tea may fairly claim to be the national beverage".

Afternoon tea became a social ritual and custom decreed that it should be accompanied with appropriate edibles. These should not be sticky, so as not to spoil ladies' gloves. And it was important that cakes and biscuits offered were not so crisp as to give off a "disagreeable crunching sound". With a wide range of fancy biscuits, including the delectable and dainty Nic Nacs, Calder & Balfour were well placed to profit from this agreeable pastime. The company's advertising, accordingly, was addressed to "Ladies who appreciate good biscuits and cakes".

Then John Balfour's wife, Elizabeth, had an idea. Why not convert the shop at 43 Rundle Street into a tea room, where Adelaide's ladies (and Adelaide's gentlemen) could enjoy their tea and coffee in attractive surroundings? Appropriately, the tea room concept had its origins in Scotland where the first was opened in Glasgow in the early 1870s.

Calder & Balfour's Tea and Coffee Saloon opened in 1885. The premises were completely rebuilt over three levels linked by sweeping blackwood staircases with cedar handrails. The *South Australian Register* reported that the result was "refreshment rooms elegantly furnished and filled with every comfort and convenience for ladies and gentlemen". A handsome verandah supported by cast iron columns and friezes led to the cake shop, behind which was the spacious "ladies' tea and coffee room", thoughtfully provided with lavatories (a convenience that had been sadly lacking in the city until then). The upper floor was designated a gentlemen's smoking room.

Tea rooms played a significant social role at this point in Australia's history. While the men had their pubs, women had few places where they could gather in public. Tea rooms became popular at a time when women were become more active in a range of causes,

including temperance and women's suffrage. Here they could congregate in respectable surroundings, unsullied by the demon drink. Perhaps conversations that began in Calder & Balfour's tea room helped South Australian women make history when they gained the right to vote and run for parliament in 1894 – the first women in the world to have equal electoral rights.

The tea room was ideally located. In the 1880s, Rundle Street became Adelaide's shopping mecca. A frenzy of construction created new hotels, terraced shops with elaborate facades, and the magnificent Adelaide Arcade with its 50 shops, Carrara marble promenade and electric lights. Under Elizabeth Balfour's management, 43 Rundle Street (later 41 Rundle Street) began the long association with the café trade that continued until 1910.

Another high point for Calder & Balfour came two years later, with the Adelaide Jubilee International Exhibition. In 1887, throughout the British Empire, loyal citizens were celebrating the 50th anniversary of Queen Victoria's accession to the throne. In Australia holidays were declared, medals were struck, cities came to life with illuminations and decorations, and newspapers published a great deal of ponderous poetry, along the lines of:

*Since Egbert ruled on Britain's main,
No sceptre's swayed so long
As in Victoria's glorious reign,
Save Edward and George the Third, alone.*

In Adelaide, there were children's parades, football matches and horse races. Special jubilee tramcars were decorated in red, white and blue and the annual exhibition became a Jubilee event. At the Jubilee Exhibition, Calder & Balfour's display of "Biscuits (fancy and charcoal) wedding cakes and cakes of all descriptions" led the list of exhibits that the judges considered worthy of special notice. They commented:

This exhibit contains sixty-eight samples of hard and soft biscuits, which are of excellent quality. Baking, perfect; mealness, ditto; variety, highest; dough mixtures, perfect.

Buoyed by his business successes, John Balfour ordered a new machine from London. Installed in the Twin Street factory, it did all the work of biscuit making except the baking, with the rolling, cutting and stamping all performed automatically in one continuous operation. The machine came with many "new and tasteful designs" for fancy biscuits, beautifully engraved on the gunmetal stamps.

These final years of the 1880s were not without personal tragedy, however. In 1889, James Calder died at the age of 72. His wife had died just two years before and the shock of her loss aggravated his heart condition. The couple had no children and we can't be sure who inherited their estate. It may well have been James's nephew Andrew Lawson Calder, whose wife, Sarah Bricknell, also came from a family in the baking trade. We'll hear more about the Bricknells later in this story.

In any case, the firm continued as Calder & Balfour and plans were made for further expansion. By 1892, John Balfour was employing a large number of staff at the Twin Street bakery and trade continued to increase. Again it was time to move and "one of the largest

and best biscuit factories in the Southern Hemisphere” was built in Cardwell Street, Adelaide.

Constructed at a cost of £4 500 and with a similar amount spent on new equipment, it was an impressive building and advertised the importance of the company. John Balfour believed that, from the new premises, he could “turn out any amount of work; only first class articles...from a loaf of bread to the most elaborate wedding cake”. The factory was launched with great fanfare in 1893. Unfortunately, the timing couldn’t have been worse.

Australia had enjoyed two decades of unparalleled prosperity during the 1870s and 1880s, thanks to the country’s first mining boom. Gold in Victoria and New South Wales and copper in South Australia had created a mood of optimism and a new moneyed class. The future looked bright and massive amounts of British capital flowed in to support colonial enterprises. Unfortunately, much of this money was channelled into property speculation, and banks were only too happy to fund a wild spree of real estate investment.

As with all bubbles, this one had to burst. A decade of poor seasons and drought saw farmers struggle and exports decline. Agricultural workers, a significant proportion of the workforce, lost their jobs. British investors started to think twice about where they put their money and, as the source of funds dried up and borrowers could not repay their loans, even the banks began to struggle. Many collapsed. People lost their savings. Individuals and companies who had taken out loans faced foreclosure. The whole country entered a period of severe economic depression – one of the worst Australia has ever seen.

John Balfour had borrowed to finance his new factory just as economic conditions were worsening. In February 1894 he was forced to declare himself insolvent and the new factory with all its machinery, as well as the leasehold and good will of the business at 41/43 Rundle Street, were put up for tender. And who should acquire these assets but Andrew Lawson Calder! By the end of the year, advertisements appeared advising the public that Andrew was carrying on the business established by his late uncle. The name Balfour disappeared from the factory’s façade and from the verandah at 41 Rundle Street.

With this sale, the union that James Calder and Margaret Balfour had forged between two families came to an end. Andrew Calder continued to run the businesses for a time, but sold the biscuit factory to a competitor in 1900 and in 1903 also sold the cafés. John Balfour, by all accounts a broken man, nevertheless managed to pay back many of his debts by keeping a small bakery and shop in Rundle Street, Adelaide. But his confidence was shattered and it’s said he sought comfort in the bottle.

John’s wife, Elizabeth, was made of sterner stuff. Rather than abandon the family’s proud tradition of quality baking, she drew on her experience at Calder & Balfour’s tea rooms to begin a new era for the business. It was a venture destined for great success.

Steam Biscuits?

James Calder was one of Australia's earliest biscuit makers and, like Arnott's in New South Wales and Swallow & Ariel in Melbourne, proudly labelled his premises as a "steam biscuit factory". But he wasn't making steamed biscuits. New technology used coal-fed steam engines to power travelling ovens and machines that kneaded and rolled the dough or stamped out the biscuit shapes. Newspaper reports praised the new mechanical process as more hygienic because it could produce biscuits that were not touched by human hands.

Bush Biscuits

Unique to South Australia, Bush Biscuits were not unlike the sturdy ship biscuits – famous more for their keeping qualities than their gourmet appeal. Nonetheless, they became a favourite with South Australians, eaten either plain or with butter and, in later years, Vegemite. Calder & Balfour were doing a special line in Bush Biscuits as early as 1885. Other manufacturers continued with the product for more than 100 years but it seems Bush Biscuits vanished some time ago.

Nic Nacs

In 1873 Calder's announced another new biscuit, the Nic Nac. We can't be sure what they looked like although they were certainly small sweet biscuits. The name came from "knick knack", meaning "a curious or pleasing trifle more for ornament than use". They were first created in London and were cut into a range of fancy shapes. Nic Nacs are still popular in Europe and can be either shaped as letters of the alphabet or tiny round biscuits with a dab of white, yellow or pink meringue on the top of each one.

CHAPTER 3

Let Them Eat Cake

Elizabeth Balfour was born Elizabeth McDonald in 1841, the daughter of a Scottish merchant. While the Calders and the Balfours were from the central lowlands of Scotland, the McDonalds were from a village near Thurso, the country's most northerly mainland town.

Elizabeth wasn't the first of her family to migrate to Australia. She was only 13 when her older sister, Roberta, married William Kerr, a storekeeper and proprietor of the Emu Flat Brewery in the Clare district north of Adelaide. Some sources say Elizabeth arrived in Australia in 1865, but by that time both Roberta and her husband had died, leaving behind three small children.

History doesn't record whether Elizabeth played a role in caring for her orphaned niece and nephews. Nor do we know how she and John Balfour first crossed paths or how their relationship developed. What we do know is that, through good times and bad, their partnership lasted for life.

When Calder & Balfour fell apart and her husband faced financial ruin, Elizabeth took charge. At this time she was 53 years old and had borne six children, but she put her considerable energies into rehabilitating the Balfour name. Family stories suggest that she took over the baking and set John to hawking her wares around Adelaide in a wheelbarrow, while she ran a small shop. She then secured a three-year lease on premises in Rundle Street and began building the Balfours business that continues to this day. With his wife's assistance, John managed to repay a large proportion of his debts within a year.

It seems there was a spirit of fierce competition and, perhaps, bad blood between the Balfours and the Calders by this time. Elizabeth had no hesitation in reminding potential customers of her new shop and café that she had been the driving force behind the tea rooms that had now fallen into Andrew Calder's hands. In 1894, a notice in the *South Australian Register* read:

PLEASE UNDERSTAND that Mrs. BALFOUR, who Managed the late Firm of Calder & Balfour's Tea Rooms and Shops for 10 years, has opened a nice CAFÉ at 74, Rundle Street. All old Customers heartily welcomed.

Elizabeth was confident that her reputation for quality and service would prevail. At her "nice café" she promised to serve the best of luncheons, fruit, cakes and pastry. But she could hardly have imagined how successful her new venture would become. For 110 years there would be a Balfour's Café at 74 Rundle Street.

And that success came quickly. By the time the lease was renewed in 1897 Balfour's Café was employing 20 people, and on the day of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in May they served more than 1 000 customers. So popular was the café that the existing space couldn't cater for customer demand, and it was decided to renovate and extend. The result, according to the *Register* was "one of the most compact and complete establishments of its kind to be found in any Australian city".

Elizabeth modelled her renovated café on Calder & Balfour's Rundle Street establishment. Facing the street was the cake shop and, on the same level, a ladies' lounge with bright wall paper and attractive furnishings. Upstairs, the smoking lounge was fitted with punkahs – large cloth fans in the Indian style. The oven on the premises operated constantly to provide the cakes and other baked goods required by the café.

Of course, the café was just one part of the business. The shop did a brisk trade in Balfour's own cakes, but supplemented these with imported confectionery and specialty goods. Christmas, as now, was a particularly busy time and one when Elizabeth made the most of her Scottish heritage, offering genuine Scotch shortbread and "the rare, but much appreciated, Scotch bun". There were mince pies, Christmas cakes, fancy chocolate boxes, bon bons and Santa Claus stockings – all the makings of a truly festive holiday season.

Like James Calder before her, Elizabeth did not hesitate to move with the times. Just three years after the first round of renovations, more extensive improvements were underway, including works to expand the on-site bakehouse which was connected to the café by a lift. Elizabeth did not have to achieve all this on her own. Her son, John Gordon (Jack) Balfour, was in his late 20s and took charge of baking operations. Elizabeth's daughter Maggie had married a respected city businessman, Charles P Wauchope. Originally contributing financial advice, Charles became increasingly involved in the success of Balfour's café as the years progressed.

To safeguard the interests of the business and to recognise the contributions of her son and son-in-law, Elizabeth Balfour took them on as partners. In 1900, the firm of E. Balfour and Co. was established. The consolidation of the family mirrored, to some degree, what was happening in Australia at the time. In 1901, the six Australian colonies joined to create a nation: the Commonwealth of Australia. Importantly, this meant the end of customs duties between the states, freeing up the trade in raw materials and manufactured goods. After the gloom of the 1890s, a more positive spirit prevailed and gradually economic conditions improved.

The following years saw yet more improvements at Balfour's. Adelaide had introduced electric street lighting in 1900 (six years behind Melbourne but four years ahead of Sydney), and in 1902 electricity came to the café. The picturesque punkahs were replaced by more practical electric fans, electric lighting was installed and several of the machines in the bakery now used electric power.

The 1902 alterations also saw the addition of "beautifully ornamented mirrors" to the Ladies' Lounge, bringing more light and a spacious feeling to the long narrow room. Bentwood chairs were set around marble-topped tables, each covered with a crisp, starched tablecloth. It was an atmosphere designed to entice fashionable ladies, while the smoking and non-smoking lounges on the upper floor were suited to the requirements of businessmen for "morning, midday, afternoon or evening".

In advertising, liberally sprinkled with capital letters that give the firm's pronouncements an exclamatory quality, Balfour's emphasised the experience that stood behind their products:

Experience teaches – Yes, and it has taught the Proprietors of Balfour’s Famous Café that the Public appreciates goods made from only the best ingredients. Our Standard Motto: – “Everything of the Finest Quality.”

The shop, too, was doing a brisk trade, supplying cakes for “home, picnic, social, journey and every other use”. It seems that, with the collapse of Calder & Balfour, Elizabeth and her family largely abandoned biscuit making in favour of cakes and pastry products. In any case, a lack of capital would have made it impossible to acquire the complex, steam-driven machinery required to manufacture biscuits. This change of direction, whether from choice or necessity, proved to be a fortunate one, as it set the stage for the firm’s success in years to come.

In the early years of the 20th century, Balfours embarked on an expansion program. Two more properties were acquired in busy King William Street, Adelaide’s central spine. The growth in demand caused by the new outlets, as well as increased wholesaling, meant that the bakery in the Rundle Street premises was no longer adequate. Jack and Charles went looking for a new site. In 1908 they found a property in Morphett Street, Adelaide, and began construction of a bakery. Expanded many times in the years to come, it was to be the manufacturing base of Balfours until 2003.

Confident that her prospering business was in safe hands, Elizabeth Balfour had retired in 1906 at the age of 65. Sadly, she had only a short retirement, dying in June 1910. A few months later her husband, John Balfour, also died. The two people who connected the firm to its pioneering days, and to Scotland, were gone. But the company, now known simply as Balfour & Co., continued, with the same commitment to providing excellent service and high quality products.

In the years leading up to World War I, Balfours was the unrivalled leader in the bakery industry in South Australia and developed their retail markets in Adelaide. A fresh round of renovations greatly increased the available space in the Rundle Street café, new shops were opened in the suburbs of Exeter and Unley, and goods could be delivered from the factory direct to customers’ homes. The first motor vehicle joined the delivery fleet of horse-drawn carts. For cafés and shops in the suburbs and in South Australian country towns Balfours’ cakes were a drawcard and featured prominently in their local advertising.

It seems that in the early 1900s it was not unusual for food at large functions such as weddings, “at homes”, parties and suppers to be composed largely of cakes – a bit like a lavish afternoon tea. Balfours offered a catering service for events like these and their price lists at the time suggested menus for up to 120 people.

For the sum of £2 you could provide those 120 guests with an extraordinary quantity and variety of cake, including tarts, cream buns, fruit sponges, “assorted fancies”, macaroons and various kinds of slab cake, ordered by the pound. There was Opera Cake, named for the famous opera house in Paris, Genoa Cake (a light fruit cake containing ground almonds and orange rind), Fig Cake, Cherry Cake, Sultana Cake, “Cocanut” Cake and a couple of pounds of Plain Cake.

Also on the list was the mysterious Ping Pong cake. The recipe for this has not survived, but we can guess that it was developed amid the growing craze for table tennis in the early 1900s. The name Ping Pong was a trademark registered in 1901 for a brand of table tennis equipment and the cake was no doubt designed to appease the appetites of early 20th century enthusiasts.

Balfours also devised cake lists for smaller functions. You could feed 12 people for five shillings or cater generously for 18 for just seven shillings and sixpence. If the thought of all that sweetness was just too much, you could add ham, tongue or other sandwiches and some sausage rolls, supplied to order.

No menus from Balfours cafés in this era have survived. However, we can guess that they were based very much on the British tea rooms of the time, offering tea, coffee, cocoa and chocolate, accompanied by bread and butter, toast, buns or scones. And, of course, cake. A light luncheon might consist of sandwiches, pies or eggs with toast, perhaps followed by fresh or stewed fruit with cream.

By 1914, Balfours had cafés in Rundle and King William Streets, cake shops in the suburbs and a busy city factory. But Jack Balfour and Charles Wauchope were looking to continue the firm's expansion. In a bold move that gained them another bakery, an extra café and a greatly expanded catering business, they engineered a merger with one of their competitors. Again, the name of the company changed. For the next ten years it would be known as Balfour, Bricknell & Co. Limited.

Scotch Bun

Sometimes called a black bun, the Scotch bun is a dark, spicy fruit cake surrounded by a yeasty pastry crust. It contains dried fruits, molasses, ginger and a good slug of whisky and is baked in a loaf tin. In Scotland, the 'bun' was traditionally served on twelfth night (6 January) but later became associated with Hogmanay (New Year's Eve) when people visit their neighbours after midnight in the custom of 'first footing'.

Cheese Cakes without Cheese

The cake lists from Balfours in 1912 often included a dozen Cheese Cakes. But these weren't the cheesecakes we know today. In fact, they didn't include cheese at all. Originally known as Welsh Cheese Cakes, they were a cross between a cake and a jam tart. The pastry shell was topped with a dab of jam, then filled with a sponge mixture that puffed up beautifully during baking. Why were these cheeseless morsels called cheesecakes? It seems no-one knows.

CHAPTER 4

Turtle Soup and Charlotte Russe

For the next chapter of our story, we need to return to gold rush days of 1853, when John Bricknell left his bakery in Bodwin, Cornwall and set out for the Victorian diggings. Unlike James Calder, John did spend time on the goldfields. He and his wife Ann-Marie lived for seven years in a tent in a mining camp at Maryborough where their eldest son, Frederick, was born in 1855.

But the miner's life eventually palled. The family moved to Adelaide, where Ann-Marie had relatives. John returned to his trade, taking over a bakery business. In the 1870s two of his sons, Fred and Frank, succeeded him in the business, which became known as Bricknell Bros.

Although it was initially a bakery and grocery business, Bricknell Bros. expanded into cafés and catering, beginning with the leasing of the Adelaide YMCA dining rooms in 1885. Three years later, however, the partnership between the brothers was amicably dissolved and Fred continued the business under his own name.

Within a few years, Fred Bricknell was a very well-known caterer, confectioner and wedding cake manufacturer. The bakery that underpinned the business was now based in Kent Town, north-east of the city, and from there Fred catered for weddings, ball suppers, parties, banquets and all social functions. As well as looking after the food, he ran a hire business providing everything from knives and forks to tables and chairs.

In 1900 Fred opened Bricknell's Café at 31 Rundle Street, just a few doors from Andrew Calder's establishment and not far from Balfour's. He was among the first to install electric lights and, in the style of the day, the décor featured mirrors, glass and white wooden panelling picked out in gold. The café also had a shop-front with an elaborate confectionery counter selling the best brands of boxed chocolates, preserved and crystallised fruits, imported biscuits and even fancy paper serviettes and doilies.

The success of Bricknell's wasn't all Fred's doing. Since 1893, he had employed Herbert Norman Hosking, an energetic youth known for his skills on the football field. Herbert must have shown a flair for the business because, when Fred's health failed in 1902, he left the management of the firm in the young man's hands. Hosking was only 23 when he took control of the café and baking business. Just five years later he was a proprietor. John Bricknell died in 1904 and before long Fred had decided to sell up and retire.

But Herbert wasn't satisfied with the café. He wanted something grander – a venue that could cater for the formal dinners so beloved of Adelaide's many clubs, associations and social groups. In 1909 Bricknell's took over the long-established Beach's Restaurant in Hindley Street. The aim was to create a restaurant that would equal those of other large cities, with appointments and cuisine as good as could be found in Melbourne or Sydney.

Between 1909 and 1913, Bricknell's Restaurant specialised in private luncheon, dinner and supper parties for organisations from the West Adelaide Football Club and the Crimean and

Indian Mutiny Veterans to the Royal Society of St George and the University of Adelaide. The additional facilities also allowed the company to expand its catering options in public buildings and private homes.

The menus for these occasions became increasingly elaborate, with many dishes in the French style. However, Herbert was aware that not everyone was up for Larded Sweetbreads al la Espagude. His price list also offered the alternative entrée of Chops and Tomato Sauce. And while there might have been the occasional Pigeonneaux en Aspic to follow, most clients were happier with Sirloin of Beef and Roast Turkey with Bread Sauce.

When it came to pudding (or, as it was then known, entremet) Bricknell's really shone. While their price list offered a choice of 14 soups (including turtle, oyster and eight kinds of consommé), 15 entrées and a total of 24 meat, fish or poultry dishes, there were more than 70 dessert dishes, from the simple Rice Custard to Diplomatic Pudding (a French version of bread and butter pudding), Nesselrode Iced Pudding (flavoured with chestnuts and maraschino) and the exotic Charlotte Russe.

Formal dinners in those days were lengthy, not simply because of the number of courses (often up to seven or eight) but because of the toasts that invariably accompanied them. Frequently the printed menu for the evening would also have a 'Toast List', beginning with the King and continuing with distinguished guests. Each toast, of course, demanded a response. It's a wonder anyone found time to eat at all.

Bricknell's claimed to be masters of "Foodology". Their advertising explained:

The Science and Art of food preparation and supply is thoroughly understood at Bricknell's. Trained chefs, capable buyers and a skilled kitchen staff enable us to place before you at our Café or Restaurant the choicest of well-cooked foods.

Herbert Hosking certainly wasn't shy when it came to promoting his business. His advertising appeared everywhere and took a much more confident tone than the polite entreaties of James Calder or the matter-of-fact announcements of Balfours. "It will grip you", one headline shouted, referring to the courteous and deft assistants and the skilfully presented dishes. "Get gripped", the copy concluded – a call to action if ever there was one. Bricknell's advertisements also began to include illustrations: drawings of fashionably dressed ladies and gentlemen and elegant table settings.

By 1913, Herbert had introduced telephone bookings. Although the first public telephone exchange had opened in Adelaide in 1883, by 1895 there were only 60 domestic subscribers, the chief barrier being the cost. Eighteen years later there were several thousand and Bricknell's advertising in the Evening Post invited football goers to reserve their tables for a post-match "Saturday night tea and refreshments" by phoning 375 or 2828.

Perhaps it was Herbert's enthusiasm for progress that led to the amalgamation of his business with Balfour & Co. With the assistance of an acquaintance from the Adelaide Rowing Club, lawyer George McEwin, he negotiated with Charles Wauchope and Jack Balfour to form the new company Balfour, Bricknell & Co. Limited. On the first Board of Directors Hosking was company secretary, while Charles Wauchope was chairman.

It seemed a perfect union, giving the new company pride of place in the industry in South Australia. According to the local press, Balfours was Bricknell's only serious rival. The *Southern Argus* of Port Elliot said that together...

...their extensive plants, perfect organization, and experienced staffs, enable them to serve remote country districts as readily, perfectly, and economically as they can in the metropolitan area.

"Our Morphett street confectionery and pastry factories are as complete and perfect as any in the world of their size and capacity and our staffs can nowhere be excelled, their products fearing no comparison," Hosking told the press. "Then the new arrangements in the shop, and in the forwarding departments will now be so complete that we shall be able to fill our country orders with greater dispatch than ever, while with our increased output we shall be also in a position to give even better value than in the past to our country patrons whose favors we so heartily appreciate that we leave no effort unspared to hold them."

The country trade was an important part of Balfour & Bricknell's business. The cakes and pastries, still bearing the name Balfours, were parcelled up and despatched daily. Far from competing with local bakers, the "fancy stuff" the firm supplied was another revenue stream for them. "Country bakers and confectioners are good customers of ours," Hosking said.

The merger also set the scene for a new round of renovations at Bricknell's café in Rundle Street. The restaurant had been sold the previous year, but the café soon boasted a "spacious, perfectly and handsomely appointed sales department", along with a dining hall more than 150 feet (45 metres) long, a banquet or ball room, a first floor afternoon tea room and even an American soda fountain. Between the two cafés, Balfour's and Bricknell's, the Directors noted that they considered their premises "unapproached for excellent comfort and convenience".

The future looked bright for the firm, but the amalgamation took place in turbulent times. Close to home, labour relations were causing concern. In 1910, a new organisation had been formed to represent all the unions in the baking trade. With the rather unwieldy title of the South Australian Baking Trades' Employees Federated Council, it put forward a series of aims. Many were reasonable. No-one, now or then, would argue that it was too much to ask for a fair day's or week's wage, or that companies should keep accurate time and wages books.

The Council had some success. Within six months, the Bakers' Wages Board had set a maximum working week of 48 hours, with extra time to be paid at one shilling and threepence an hour. By 1912, journeymen bakers were earning £3 a week. There was a special rate of one and sixpence an hour for hot cross bun makers, presumably to compensate for the intensive workload over a few days (and nights) at Easter.

The sticking point between the Council and the employers was the desire to end night work and early starts, and to have the majority of workers in the industry doing their work between 7am and 6pm. Employers responded that without a 5am start the citizens of South Australia

would be deprived of fresh pastries, cakes, and bread for their lunchtime sandwiches. On this issue the interests of the public, and the employers, prevailed.

It may be that Herbert Hosking and the Balfours directors thought they would have a stronger negotiating position on workplace issues as one company. No doubt there were also economies of scale in the manufacturing operation and Balfour's Morphett Street factory was enlarged accordingly. The cafés, although now owned by the merged company, kept their original names. Perhaps old loyalties persisted, although customers could expect a similar experience whether they opted for Balfour's or Bricknell's.

Trouble was also brewing in the wider world. In Europe, the past few years had been marked by increased militarism. There were conflicts in the Balkans and in Turkey and the great powers, including Britain, seemed poised for war. The spirit of Empire was still very much alive in Australia, with the Opposition Leader Andrew Fisher declaring that "should the worst happen, after everything has been done that honour will permit, Australians will stand beside the mother country to help and defend her to our last man and our last shilling". Other, more pragmatic souls commented that war could bring a bonanza to Australia's wheat growers and other primary producers.

The new company Board was aware of the challenges war could bring and prudently began building up stocks of flour and other essential ingredients. It was a wise move. Just five months after the merger, war was declared. It was to cost Australia dearly, cutting a swathe through our country's young men. From a population of fewer than five million, 416,809 men enlisted. More than 156,000 of them were wounded, gassed or taken prisoner and 60,000 were killed. Among them were at least two of the company's staff. The Board minutes recorded that "Privates Westbury and Heron had made the supreme sacrifice, to the deep regret of their comrades".

The combined effects of the war and drought conditions called for more conservative management and rigid supervision of finances. As expected, flour prices increased and there was the prospect of heavy war taxation. By the middle of 1915, stocks of flour were depleted. The following year the Directors lamented that "high prices, high wages and high costs had come to stay, at any rate until the World's markets were readjusted".

In 1915 yet another headache arose for restaurateurs. The temperance movement wasn't new. For decades, organisations like the Women's Christian Temperance Union had been campaigning for the prohibition of alcohol. With the coming war, they saw their chance. Trumpeting the need for Australians at home to be morally upright in support of our fighting men, they persuaded state governments to propose early closing times for pubs and otherwise tighten liquor laws. In a referendum in March 1915, conservative South Australia voted for 6 o'clock closing, the first state in Australia to do so. And so it remained until 1967.

The new laws allowed restaurants to sell only wine, cider or perry and that only between the hours of 12 noon and 2pm, and from 6pm to 8pm. Exceptions could be made for formal dinners, but only with the consent of two magistrates. There were riotous scenes in the streets of Adelaide as thirsty men marched on the Adelaide Club, which had been exempted

from the new laws. It seemed that making an exception for the “toffs” was the only way the government could get the legislation through parliament.

And the war didn't halt industrial action. The “day baking of bread” dispute dragged on, while a coal strike just before Christmas in 1916 saw gas supplies to Adelaide cafés and restaurants abruptly cut off and an embargo on gas and electricity for industrial power. Balfour's and Bricknell's scrambled to overcome the difficulties, deleting many items from the café menus and finding other means to heat the water for tea and coffee.

In the face of these challenges, the company's strength lay in its people. A note in the Board minutes read: “The Directors wish to record their appreciation of the loyal efforts of their staff – their devotion to the interests of the Company. They are especially happy in the constitution of the staff, the routine attention to business, general ability, and the discipline being such that any Company would be proud of.”

Perhaps the pressure of war contributed to the decision to close the shops in Exeter and Unley. But larger moves were afoot. In 1917, creating a new entity called Balfours Ltd, the firm bought the Grand Café, in a prime position at 58 King William Street. Already a going concern, it provided “spacious and comfortable rooms for Grills and Light Refreshments, conducted on Balfour's famous and popular lines”. As a result of this acquisition, the other King William Street premises were closed.

The war, far from being over by Christmas 1914, as some predicted, had dragged on through four Christmases. Through them all, Balfours' Christmas cakes, mince pies, shortbread and other confections had helped to cheer Adelaide's families, as they hoped for news of their sons, brothers, husbands and sweethearts serving overseas.

Christmas 1918 was to be a happier time. On 11 November, news of the armistice had prompted hundreds of thousands of people to jam the streets of cities and towns across Australia. Bells rang and flags waved as, cheering and singing, the joyful crowds celebrated the peace. *God Save the King* and *Rule Britannia* alternated with *La Marseillaise* and *It's a Long Way to Tipperary*.

Peace had arrived and a new era of progress was beginning.

Charlotte Russe

This classic dessert is made in a mould, originally lined with stale bread but later with sponge fingers. It is filled with custard set with gelatin and may be topped with jelly and fruit. It is attributed to the French chef Carême who named it “Russe” in honour of his Russian employer Czar Alexander I. However, while the “Charlotte” part of the name may have referred to one of the Czar’s relatives it seems more likely it’s a version of the old English word “charlyt” meaning ‘a dish of custard’.

Soda Fountain Drinks and Summer Dainties

In the early 1900s, the American-style soda fountain arrived in Australia. At Bricknell’s Café a special summer menu offered plain and ice cream sodas, sundaes and milk shakes, all of which we would recognise today. But then there were the drinks known as “phosphates” – long vanished from your friendly neighbourhood milk bar. Plain sodas were a mix of flavoured syrup and soda water. To turn a plain soda into a phosphate, you added a teaspoon of “acid phosphate” – a partially neutralized solution of phosphoric acid made with salts of calcium, magnesium and potassium. With the same acidity as lime juice, but with virtually no flavour of its own, it apparently added a touch of sourness and enhanced the other flavours of the drink. Bricknell’s did phosphates in ten different flavours: mostly fruity but including chocolate, vanilla, sarsaparilla and kola.

CHAPTER 5

Three Men and a Frog

As the 1920s began, Australia was recovering, not just from the war years but from the influenza pandemic that followed. The so-called “Spanish flu” had killed around 50 million people worldwide, including more than 11,000 in Australia. As authorities scrambled to contain the flu’s spread, state borders were closed, affecting trade and tourism. Around 600 South Australians, stranded in Victoria were returned to Adelaide on a special train and quarantined in a tent city on Jubilee Oval. No doubt Balfour & Bricknell’s cafés suffered, as people eschewed public places of entertainment for fear of infection.

However, once the epidemic and memories of war had abated, Australia was in an optimistic mood. This was the decade that would see great feats of aviation, the rise of the motor car and the arrival of radio. Hemlines were up, cocktails were downed. It was the era of the “flapper” and even conservative Adelaide kicked up its heels. Dance halls were advertising programmes that included the Charleston, the Big Apple, the Black Bottom and the Military Two Step, to be joined in 1925 by the Tango. The gaily illuminated Floating Palais on the River Torrens allowed patrons to enjoy the cool night airs as they cavorted, undeterred by reports of one “Tinker” Wallace disappearing overboard during a particularly frenzied dance number.

“Progress” was the watchword, as national and state governments moved to encourage manufacturing. Balfour & Bricknell were poised to take up the challenge, led by three determined men. Together, Jack Balfour, Charles Wauchope and Herbert Hosking made a strong management team, but they were quite different personalities.

John Gordon (Jack) Balfour was born in 1872. By then his parents, John and Elizabeth Balfour, were no longer living above James Calder’s shop in Rundle Street but had moved to Hackney. It’s possible that they lived with the Calders in the stately Hailes House, a two-storey residence with extensive lands, including a gardener’s cottage, coachman’s cottage and stables. Jack attended Whinham College, a private college in North Adelaide that had the avowed aims of developing moral training, physical training, and mental training, in that order.

We don’t know a lot about Jack’s early career. He passed Adelaide University’s Preliminary Exam and studied art for a few years, but subsequent events suggest that he soon took up his father’s trade. By the time his mother opened her café in 1895 he had the knowledge and skill to control the baking operations and in 1901 became a partner in the business.

By then, Jack had a home and family of his own. In 1898 he bought a block of land in the new suburb of Millswood, next door to one owned by his sister Maggie and her husband Charles Wauchope. The handsome sandstone villa he constructed there may not have been completed in time for his marriage in 1899, but was certainly where his first daughter was born the following year. He was to have five more daughters but only one son, Gordon, who was born in 1905.

As a Master Baker, Pâtissier and Confectioner, Jack Balfour was well-prepared to take charge of production in an ever-expanding business. But he had other interests too. He became a stalwart of the Flinders Street Presbyterian Church, serving as an elder and an office-bearer of the church council. He was a founder, benefactor and governor of Adelaide's Scotch College and remained involved in the affairs of the school throughout his life.

Privately, though, Jack's passions were flowers and chooks. In the early 1900s he entered his Buff Orpingtons in a series of egg-laying competitions held by South Australia's Roseworthy Agricultural College. Sadly, their 416 eggs for the month of October 1904 were trumped by Sunnyhurst Farm's White Leghorns at 682 and W. A. E. Smith's Silver Wynandottes at 549.

Jack's competitive spirit also extended to his flowers. After moving to Unley in 1905, he set about cultivating a garden, where his roses were to be the envy of his neighbours. With those roses he carried off many trophies in the local flower shows. However, his pansies were underwhelming. "The pansies were won by Mr J. G. Balfour but were of medium quality," the *Adelaide Mail* reported in 1916.

If Jack Balfour had the industry knowledge, his brother-in-law Charles Patrick Wauchope had the financial skills. Charles, too, was of Scottish stock. His grandfather, Captain John William Wauchope had been one of Adelaide's earliest immigrants, arriving from Glasgow with his wife and children in 1839. Charles was born in the copper town of Kapunda in 1868 but moved with his parents to Adelaide when he was 15.

There was no private college for Charles. He attended Sturt Street Public School in the city and, on leaving, began working as a clerk at John Martin & Co., already one of Adelaide's leading retailers. It didn't take long for his leadership qualities to emerge. Within a few years he was Secretary of the firm's Athletics Club and chairing their Picnic Committee. In 1892 he was elected President of John Martin & Co.'s newly founded Literary Society.

The direction of Charles's life was destined to change, however. In 1893 he married Maggie, John and Elizabeth Balfours' eldest daughter. At their wedding, held at the Balfour's Angus Street home in the city, no-one could have foretold the hard times that lay ahead for the bride's family. But by 1895 John Balfour's finances were in ruins. Charles decided to resign from his job and devote his energies to helping his in-laws rebuild their business. To show their esteem for his service, John Martin's held a 'complimentary social' to bid him farewell. At Balfours Café, of course.

Charles and Maggie initially lived in the city, in a small cottage that still stands on the corner of Kenton and Cardwell Streets, but by 1900 had moved to Millswood, next door to brother Jack. It seems Charles was also a keen gardener, and perhaps there was some rivalry between the two neighbours to see whose thumb was the greenest.

However, central to Charles's life was his devotion to his faith. A Christadelphian, he delivered many lectures on the Bible's teachings throughout Australia and was to make successful overseas speaking tours in 1925 and 1930, visiting England, Scotland and Canada. He also edited a monthly magazine devoted to the interests of the Christadelphians

in Australia. The content of Charles's speeches may have been somewhat alarming to his colleagues. Based on a close study of bible texts, he predicted that Armageddon and the second coming of Christ would occur in 1934 – which must have presented a challenge for business planning. Nonetheless, his commitment to a high standard of ethics, along with his business experience, made him the natural choice as Chairman of Directors at Balfour & Bricknell.

The third member of this triumvirate, Herbert Norman Hosking, was the youngest. His background was Cornish. It's likely that his grandfather was one of many miners from Cornwall attracted to South Australia by the discovery of copper at Burra in 1845, and the family lived there for some time. However, Herbert was born in the inner suburb of Norwood.

Herbert attended Norwood School but, as was common at the time, left at the age of 14 to start work at Bricknell's. By all reports he was a very energetic young man, at work and at play. We've already seen how quickly he assumed the management of Fred Bricknell's business. And a contemporary publication reported that "Prior to the year 1902 the subject under notice devoted much of his leisure time to football and other healthy outdoor pastimes".

As management responsibilities demanded more of his time, Herbert was forced to restrict his healthy outdoor pursuits to rowing and golf. However, he encouraged his employees to be active, organising walking races between the staff of his Kent Town and Rundle Street branches. Herbert himself acted as starter and handicapper. In one such event, in 1903, seventeen contestants completed the nine mile course, despite being nearly blinded and thoroughly soaked by rain for the last three miles. One hapless competitor failed to finish. We can only hope he was treated with sympathy rather than scorn.

At Balfour & Bricknell, Herbert applied his energies to the management and promotion of the cafés. Perhaps it was at his prompting that Balfours entered the 1915 Manufacturers' Week competition for the best window display, carrying off second prize. And his pro-advertising ideas saw the company's products and cafés promoted in the annual South Australian Directories and Adelaide newspapers.

By all accounts, Herbert was a people person. It may have been his influence that created an increasingly social side to working at Balfour & Bricknell. There was a company cricket team, factory picnics and staff socials for the cafés. The desire to foster a family atmosphere was motivated by more than profit. It's clear that the Directors took a personal interest in their employees, who responded with a sense of pride in their company's reputation.

Company records show that employees also had a say in the direction of the business. Consultation between senior staff and the Directors helped to solve the problems created by a booming trade, with new ideas on the production, delivery and presentation of products. Many of the staff also had a direct stake in the success of the firm, via an employees' share trust that had been established at the time of the merger in 1914.

For ten years after the merger, the Bricknell's name continued. Fred Bricknell had evidently retained a small shareholding, although he had long left the business and moved to Sydney.

There, in 1923, he died. The following year the company became Balfour Wauchope Limited. The third founding director, Herbert Hosking, never managed to get his name on the door.

The name change made sense for another reason. In 1919, Bricknell & Balfour had bought the Griffiths Tea building at 49 Rundle Street. This grand four-storey building, although originally constructed as a tea and coffee warehouse, was transformed into one of Adelaide's most glamorous reception venues, the Windsor Café. When the new café opened in 1922, Bricknell's Café at 31 Rundle Street was closed. Now there was no shop front to keep the name in the public eye and the company moved its headquarters to the newly-acquired building. In 1924, the Bricknell name was gone. From then on, all the cafés and the bakery products were branded Balfours.

Not content with the new Windsor Café, Balfours soon began another project – the rebuilding of their establishment at 72 Rundle Street. Since 1917, the first floor of the café had extended above the adjoining Catt's department store. With those premises about to be sold, Balfours would lose the space for 300 people. Something had to be done.

The decision was taken to re-build the café and, again, the company retained the services of one of Adelaide's most noted architects, Louis Laybourne-Smith. The innovative building that took shape featured a distinctive glass and steel studio-style window facing Rundle Street – the façade that is still visible (and heritage listed) today. The windows flooded all the upper levels of the café with natural light. Some of the familiar timber panelling was retained, no doubt to keep faithful customers within their comfort zone. The official opening of the new Balfours Café was held on 30 September 1924 and business was to continue in this building until 2004.

During the 1920s, many an event was held at Balfours' cafés. There were coming-of-age parties, dances, weddings and at least one 91st birthday party. The newspaper reports of the time gush over the splendour of the decorations and the beauty of the frocks. At a "delightful dance" in 1925, the hall was resplendent with gold and tangerine streamers and bunches of balloons around the walls. Miss Connie Copas wowed them in her "frock of Parisian flame velvet, with a wide hem of white fur". Other ladies dazzled in eau de nil floral georgette, primrose lamé, silver lace or powder-blue satin.

But not every event was as glamorous. The Rotary Club gathered at Balfours in King William Street for their weekly luncheon and the Master Bakers Association held their convention there. The S.A. Collie & Pom Club chose Balfours for their annual prize-giving, while at the Windsor Café Professor Coleman Phillipson lectured a meeting of the Justices' Association on the subject of "Trial by Jury".

Members of the city's business elite had a habit of meeting for lunch at one of the Balfour's cafés and it seemed each group had a favourite. *The News* reported that among the habitués of the King William Street café were the Commissioner of Taxes, the Director of Agriculture and the managing director of Thomas Hardy & Sons. At the Windsor Café you might find the Registrar of Adelaide University and the secretary of the Retail Grocers'

Association, while the Commonwealth Electoral Officer and a director of the retailer Harris Scarfe generally chose Balfours at 72 Rundle Street.

To manage the ever-expanding café business Herbert Hosking recruited his younger brother. Having served with distinction at Gallipoli, France and Flanders, Wilfred Hosking had attained the rank of major. Now, instead of a company of soldiers, he was commanding a troop of waitresses, cooks and kitchen hands. Wilfred would later become the head of the RSL, then known as the RSSILA (Returned Sailors and Soldiers Imperial League of Australia), and go on play a leading role in the Australian army's catering corps in World War II.

While the Hoskings principally focused on the cafés and catering, the bakery absorbed the energies of Jack Balfour. Early in 1923 he departed for a six-month fact-finding tour of Europe, the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States. Jack was particularly interested in the operations of Lyons, the biggest firm in the English catering trade. Many of Balfours' products, and their packaging, bore a marked resemblance to those illustrated in the Lyons catalogues of the day.

On this trip, Jack may also have investigated the big news in patisserie: fondant. The name for this sugar and water paste comes from the French word "fondre" which means "to melt". Previously fondant had been used to make individual sweets, but early in the 20th century began to appear as an icing on small cakes. Either the cakes could be dipped in the melted fondant or it could be poured over them – a process known as enrobing – to produce a smooth, silky finish. Starting in the 1920s, many of Balfours "Assorted Fancies" had fondant icing as a base for further decoration. The most famous of these, of course, was the frog cake, which deserves a chapter all its own.

In 1925, two years after Jack Balfour returned, Charles Wauchope took extended leave, travelling through America and Europe. Like Jack. before him, he was shocked by the state of industry in Britain and the consequent unemployment. He returned with a message for Australians: we should do our utmost to foster trade within the Empire.

Today, when it's an easy matter to hop on a jet, international business travel is commonplace. When James Calder made his first trip back to Britain in 1865, it meant an arduous sea journey of many weeks. By the early 1920s the journey could be accomplished by passenger liner in around 45 days – still a significant commitment of time and funds. Balfours maintained the tradition, however, and in 1928 another Balfour was on his way overseas. This time the traveller was Jack Balfour's only son, Gordon. A new generation had joined the family business.

Melvich Cake

The story of Melvich Cake is an intriguing one. From 1914 it was one of Balfours' most heavily promoted cakes, with regular newspaper advertising and even signs on the company's delivery vehicles. It was advertised as "the perfect 6d cake" and exclusive to Balfours. Initially a round cake, it had a paper collar declaring it to be "A production of exceptional quality". The cake remained in the Balfours range until 1960, by which time it was produced in a bar rather than a round form.

A hand-written copy of the recipe was found in a notebook kept by a Balfours baker Joseph Bateman, dating to around 1931. Essentially, it's a plain butter cake flavoured and coloured with a special lemon essence, later referred to in bakery records as simply "Melvich essence".

But why Melvich? The answer lies in Elizabeth Balfour's origins. Melvich, a town on the extreme north coast of Scotland, is where she was born. But rather than being a traditional recipe from Elizabeth's homeland, handed down from mother to son, it's most likely that Melvich was simply a brand name invented for a fairly standard cake recipe. The fact that Jack Balfour's house in Unley Park was called "Melvich" reinforces this idea.

There were other sixpenny cakes in the market at the same time. The Letitia Cake from Thomas A. Cook, advertised from around 1912, was named after the baker's mother who had recently died. Another bakery offered the Australia Cake, again for sixpence. Although the early advertising lacked a certain flair, Balfours recognised the importance of a brand and the longevity of the Melvich name suggests it enjoyed considerable success.

Tennis Cake

According to the *Oxford Companion to Food*, Tennis Cake is "an English Victorian cake made to accompany the newly invented game of tennis". Lawn tennis arrived in Australia in the 1870s and quickly became popular with both men and women. The first Australasian Championships (the forerunner of the Australian Open) in 1904 boosted the sport's profile. Many society families installed private courts and no doubt needed to offer a nice cup of tea and a piece of cake after a game.

Tennis Cake is a light fruit cake containing finely chopped glacé cherries and candied peel, although some recipes include angelica or even chopped dried apricots. It may be flavoured with vanilla, cinnamon and maraschino liqueur or with orange essence. A version described in the 1944 edition of the *Green and Gold Cookery* book omits the cherries, but includes lexias (raisins), currants, sultanas and almonds.

Some of the early recipes give elaborate instructions for decorating the cake to resemble a tennis court, although the *Companion* says the traditional topping was icing scattered with chopped glacé cherries and angelica. A promotional poster from the 1920s suggests that the Balfours version may have had this simpler topping.

The Cafés – a Timeline

1885 Calder & Balfour Tea and Coffee Saloon opens at 41 Rundle Street under Elizabeth Balfour's management

1885 Bricknell's first catering operations begin with the lease of the YMCA dining room in Gawler Street

1894 Calder & Balfour in receivership and tea room acquired by Andrew Calder

1894 Elizabeth opens Balfour's Tea Rooms at 74 Rundle Street in opposition to Andrew Calder. Renovations take place in 1897, 1900, 1902 and 1910.

1900 Bricknell's Café established at 31 Rundle Street

1903 Andrew Calder sells his café and retires from the café business

1904 Balfours open an outlet at 184a King William Street

1905/6 Balfours open new premises at 48 King William Street

1908 Bricknell's Restaurant established with the acquisition of Beach's Restaurant at 9 Hindley Street

1913 Bricknell's Restaurant sold.

1914 Balfours and Bricknell's merge but both café names are continued.

1917 Grand Café at 58 King William Street acquired from Jackman's Limited

1917 With the opening of the Grand Café, the premises at 184a King William Street and 48 King William Street are closed

1920 Street renumbering in Adelaide city changes Balfour's Café address to 72 Rundle Street

1922 Windsor Café at 49 Rundle Street (formerly the Griffiths building) opens and the building is renamed the Balfours Building

1922 Bricknell's café at 31 Rundle Street closed.

1924 Café at 72 Rundle Street extensively rebuilt and remodelled, producing the building that remains today

1965 Windsor Café in Rundle Street closed

1972 Site of the Grand Café in King William Street sold

1974 Grand Café demolished to make way for Southern Cross arcade

1979 Balfours Café at 72 Rundle Mall closed but bakery shop continued – café reopened several years later

2004 Balfours Café at 72 Rundle Mall closed permanently

CHAPTER 6

The Edible Icon

If you're South Australian, you will undoubtedly know what a Balfours Frog Cake is. If you're from anywhere else, you've probably never seen one. A cube of sponge cake with a layer of jam through the middle is topped with a dome of creamy filling and covered in fondant icing. The dome is then slashed with a hot knife to form the 'mouth', and two tiny black eyes are piped on to complete the cute froggy face. The last two steps of this operation still involve teams of workers with knives and piping tubes at the ready, completing the Frog Cakes by hand.

This combination of sponge, jam and creamy topping, covered in green icing, is similar to a popular Swedish confection called a Prinsesstårta, or Princess Cake. However, since the Princess Cake wasn't invented until the 1930s, it couldn't have inspired the Frog. Perhaps they share some DNA though – a common ancestor lost to history. Although originally green, Frog Cakes now also come in chocolate and pink colours and there are bite-size 'Mini Frogs' as well.

At the time of writing, the Balfours Frog Cake has been a family favourite for more than 90 years. But the accepted story of its introduction to the Balfours range is open to question. Wikipedia (yes, Frog Cakes warrant their own Wikipedia entry) asserts that the cakes first appeared in 1922, introduced by Gordon Balfour on his return from overseas. The problem with this story is that, as we have just seen, Gordon didn't go overseas until 1928. In fact, in 1922, he was still attending Prince Alfred College in Adelaide. Perhaps it was his father, Jack Balfour, who introduced the Frog Cake after his 1923 trip. He did visit Paris, where French pâtissiers were already making fondant-covered petit fours. So maybe the frog travelled from France to a new home in the antipodes.

These beguiling critters have become so identified with their native habitat that there's a whole chapter titled "The Frog Cake" in writer Kerryn Goldsworthy's 2011 book, *Adelaide*. In the book, Ms Goldsworthy chronicles the cake's association with AFL football, another of South Australia's passions. In 2010, she tells us, Balfours produced a special run of black and white iced Frog Cakes to be handed out at a rally held to save the Port Adelaide Magpies, Adelaide's oldest football club, from extinction.

Balfours has also regularly sponsored the local AFL derby, when Port Adelaide (The Power) played Adelaide (The Crows). The Balfours Showdowns, as these matches were dubbed, were marked by the production of Frog Cakes in the navy, red and gold of the Crows and the teal, silver, black and white of the Power. The Balfours Frog Cake mascot entertained the crowds and Balfours products and backpacks were on offer at the games. No wonder Adelaideans were so ready to believe in the fantasy of a frog-shaped footy stadium.

It could be argued that no local event is complete without a Frog Cake or six. Kerryn Goldsworthy reports attending at least one Adelaide funeral where they were served at the wake. And local brides have been known to request a pyramid of white Frog Cakes, or even a giant Frog Cake, as a wedding cake. When South Australia was pitching Adelaide as the

location for the World Police and Fire Games in 2007, the Minister for Tourism served an assortment of them to the judges. The frogs have even been known to sport moustaches in support of Movember, the charity event that highlights men's health or appear at Christmas dressed in seasonal attire.

And then there's the Frog Cake as art. In 2015 an exhibition at Adelaide's Light Square Gallery featured 140 artworks: ceramic frog cakes, wooden frog cakes, resin and silver frog cakes. The artworks were sold to raise money for mental health research, the most expensive piece selling for \$6000. In total, the show raised \$30,000.

Over the years, there have been variants of the frog. Mice, cats and chickens have come and gone. When Adelaide hosted the Formula 1 Grand Prix from 1985 to 1995, the rounded shape atop the frog lent itself to a racing helmet design.

While they're not Balfours' biggest selling line, Frog Cakes seem to have a symbolic significance for South Australians. They've even inspired poetry, like this ode to nostalgia from Sue Cook. Subtitled *Adelaide 1952*, it was first published in *InDaily* in 2015 and read, in part...

*Seven excited girls, chattering
like lorikeets at a feeder,
almost big enough to sit up to the best table
laden with mum's hearty home-baked birthday spread,
except for one daring, taste tantalising plate
piled high with Balfours' frog cakes, iced in
garish green, Barbie pink and chocolate, in paper skirts,
square bodies with domed heads,
icing blob eyes and yawning cream maws.
Tempting beyond seven-year-old dreams
of princesses kissing frogs....*

So much affection did locals have for the Balfours icon that when the company was in financial difficulties in 2000 people rushed to buy Frog Cakes as a gesture of support. In response to a suggestion in *The Advertiser*, sales doubled, reaching an all-time high. In 2001, Balfours registered the name and the shape of the product as a trademark. Then, in 2004, the National Trust declared frog cakes to be an official South Australian State Icon. It is one of the few instances where a heritage-listed object can be regularly demolished.

CHAPTER 7

The Icing on the Cake

The two family members joining the firm of Balfour & Wauchope in the 1920s both bore the good Scottish name of Gordon. Gordon Wauchope and Gordon McDonald (Mac) Balfour were both grandsons of John and Elizabeth Balfour. They were much of an age; Gordon Wauchope was born in 1904 and his cousin in 1905. Gordon Wauchope had distinguished himself as a schoolboy athlete at Scotch College while Gordon Balfour had gained a reputation as a crack shot in the Prince Alfred College cadet corps. On leaving their prestigious schools, they became lowly factory hands, their fathers insisting that they learn the business from the bottom up. But there was no doubt that management roles awaited them or that both would rise ably to the challenge.

Destined to follow in his father's footsteps in the bakery, in 1928 Gordon Balfour was sent on a study trip to Europe and Britain. In Scotland Gordon worked for an extended period at McVitie & Price in Edinburgh. Arguably Britain's leading biscuit makers, in the 1920s McVitie's had two new hugely successful products on their hands: Chocolate Digestives and Jaffa Cakes. Their equally famous biscuit, the Penguin (which was to be the inspiration for Australia's Tim Tam) was just four years in the future. There were well over 300 products in the McVitie range. Here Gordon could learn from Scottish Master Bakers as well as coming to grips with the complex requirements of a large manufacturing operation: hygiene, quality control, stock control and the purchase of raw ingredients.

In Europe, Gordon visited leading bakeries and biscuit makers in Belgium and Germany. It was a good time to visit; Germany had recovered from the misery and economic chaos that followed World War I. By 1929 the country was producing 33 per cent more than before the war. It was the second highest-producing industrial nation after the USA and a centre of manufacturing innovation – a drawcard for visitors from many different industries. Gordon was impressed with Germany's combination of advanced technology and traditional baking. He avidly collected recipes for cakes and yeast goods to add to the Balfours range on his return.

Back in Adelaide, Gordon Balfour was appointed as a Local Director of Balfour Wauchope along with his cousin Gordon Wauchope. He was ready to take on management responsibilities and apply his knowledge to the Balfours bakery operation. "Mac" adopted an uncompromising approach to cleanliness. It was something that remained a primary concern, almost an obsession, for the rest of his working life and factory staff had to be prepared for the rigour of his daily spot checks.

The importance of this was not lost on the public, or the press. *The News* reported in 1930: *For many years the name of Balfour has represented the best, most up to date, and hygienic of foodstuffs. These points are exemplified in the large factory of Balfour, Wauchope, Limited, where cakes, pastries, and confectionery are manufactured under the strictest supervision ensuring that consistency of quality which has established such an enviable reputation.* All the Balfours advertising now began to include the word "hygienic".

Gordon Balfour also instituted a seasonal purchasing cycle, emphasising the quality and freshness of ingredients. Fortunately, much of what he required was available on his doorstep. Dried fruits, vital to Balfours' famous fruit cakes and buns, were easily sourced from the nearby irrigation areas along the Murray River. South Australian wheat farmers, suffering from depressed export markets, were glad to find local demand for fine flour. A Balfours advertisement in 1931 stressed the company's support for local suppliers, informing customers that their cakes were:

Freshly Made Each Morning from:- South Australian flour, South Australian eggs, South Australian butter, South Australian fruits, by South Australian artisans.

The message of support for local industry (and, by extension, jobs) was particularly important because, by then, Australia had been plunged into the worst economic depression the world has known. The buoyant mood Gordon Balfour had encountered in Europe had come to an abrupt end when, on October 24, 1929, the New York stock market crashed, sending the world into economic freefall. In Germany, the wave of prosperity built on American loan money collapsed. Australia too, had a heavy debt burden and was already suffering because of falling wheat and wool prices.

At the peak of the Great Depression, in 1932, unemployment in Australia reached 32 per cent. Banks failed. Families were evicted from their homes because they couldn't meet the mortgage payments or the rent. In Adelaide, a squalid campsite of tin huts and tents appeared along the banks of the River Torrens. The Government supplied rations to the destitute, but they were scarcely enough to sustain life. Many men took to the road, hoping to be given food and shelter in exchange for manual labour on rural properties.

Balfours cafés kept trading through these dark days, despite challenging business conditions. Initially, despite a drop in takings, the establishments were maintained at full strength. However, by the end of 1929, two of the café rooms had been closed down and price cuts were soon introduced to help boost turnover. Coffee, tea, cocoa and chocolate went from sixpence to four pence a pot and even spaghetti on toast was reduced.

"The past is no longer any criterion for the future," Herbert Hosking recorded glumly in the board minutes. "It is unduly optimistic to hope for any improvement as the lifeblood of business is being slowly but surely drained." In 1932, the firm's sales had dropped more than 45 per cent compared to the peak year of 1927.

Despite the challenging conditions, the company did its share to help those who were struggling. Even before the Depression hit, Balfour Wauchope was conscious of its social responsibilities, helping charities support the hungry and poor. As *The Register* reported in mid-1929: "At Balfour Wauchope Ltd.'s factory all food left over is collected every morning and distributed to different institutions." Wilfred Hosking told the paper "There is no waste...and our staff co-operates whole-heartedly in the salvage of surplus foods."

Through the Depression years, when hungry people congregated at the back entrances of the cafés or the factory, they were given a meal. The regular delivery of pies and cakes to

organisations like the Salvation Army continued. Balfours also supported the Whitefields Institute, a church-backed charitable organisation that operated a soup kitchen and provided work for tradespeople. For the Whitefield's children's party in 1930, Balfours' skilled decorators produced a "Lighthouse cake"— a source of great delight for children normally deprived of such luxuries.

Not all was bleak in the 1930s. In tough times, people turned to distractions like sport and the movies. In cricket, the young Donald Bradman was making waves, scoring 334 in the third test of the 1930 Ashes series in England and helping seal Australia's series victory. It made "The Don" a popular hero and his exploits through the 1930s lifted people's spirits and were a cause for national pride.

Australians also flocked to the movies for a chance to enter a fantasy world far removed from the grim reality of everyday life. Tasmanian-born Errol Flynn cut a swashbuckling figure in Hollywood films, but it was an endearing cartoon character who brought cheer to young and old alike. Mickey the Mouse, as he was then known, was created by Disney Studios in 1928. In 1932, the Star Theatre chain in Adelaide celebrated Mickey's latest release with Monster Birthday Parties and two huge birthday cakes featuring the character. They were baked and decorated, of course, by Balfour Wauchope Ltd. With up to 5000 children expected for the Saturday afternoon events, those three-tier cakes were surely a sight to behold.

By September 1932, there were hopeful signs that the worst was over – at least for Balfours. Although the company was "fighting with its back to the wall" it seemed that the downward trend had been arrested. Some products had made the supreme sacrifice: loganberry and orange sponge was to be seen no more. But the reduced cost of ingredients and pruning of expenses were starting to show results.

Then the firm suffered a sudden blow: Charles Wauchope died. One of the founding directors was gone. Four years later, in another cruel twist, Jack Balfour also died unexpectedly. It was time for the next generation of the two families to join with Herbert Hosking in leading the company. Gordon Wauchope became Chairman, a position he was to hold for the rest of his life.

He inherited a complex business. In 1934, the factory staff numbered around 70 and their products supplied the three cafés as well as around two hundred wholesale customers in the suburbs and country South Australia. Sales through these shops were strictly controlled, as stores competed to be part of the Balfours network. To be selected, a store could not be too close to another outlet and was required to maintain the prices set by the company (a practice that was perfectly legal until 1971).

There were just six drivers delivering to the inner suburbs in company trucks while deliveries to more distant suburbs went by train or tram, carefully packed in large blue boxes. Country orders were sent by train, packed in wooden crates or tea chests. There were dinner rolls and bread, several kinds of fancy biscuits, buns, scones, cakes of all descriptions and the popular pies, sausage rolls and pasties. And, of course, Balfours' wedding and special-

occasion cakes, made to order and meticulously crafted in the company's famous decorating department.

In these difficult times, the cafés were, as a member of the Balfour family aptly quipped, "putting the icing on the cakes". They accounted for a third of the company's business and continued to trade through the lean years, although Wilfred Hosking recognised that tastes were changing. "We find that the demand now is for plainer, wholesome foods, with a tendency toward green salads and fresh and stewed fruits," he told the press, adding that his lunchtime customers were asking for "a small serve of fish with green salads, and prunes and rhubarb for sweets." Perhaps they were gentlemen with sedentary occupations.

There were other challenges too. Competition was coming from a new quarter: department stores. Coles launched the first of their famous cafeterias in Melbourne in 1930 and in 1932 their new Rundle Street store opened with great fanfare, offering "quick service lunch and tea counters for busy shoppers". The Myer Emporium advertised their third floor cafeteria, where, in summer, "seashore coolness [was] maintained by the use of refrigerated atmosphere" and you could indulge in daily specials such as herrings in tomato sauce for just sixpence. In 1934, John Martin's plans for a new seven-storey section of their Rundle Street store included, on the second-floor, "the largest café and restaurant in Adelaide".

The factory faced challenges of its own. New taxes – sales tax and then a flour tax – cut into profits. There was a pricing dilemma: should they raise prices to cover the taxes or to lower them to encourage extra sales? The Balfours bakers came to the rescue with a stream of popular new products. The Cream Sandwich, a round sponge iced on top and filled with rich cream came in raspberry, chocolate and vanilla variations. Home-made style fruit sponges (take your pick from pineapple, banana, passion, ginger or orange) were promoted as delicious for afternoon teas, bridge parties and suppers. And in 1934 the latest offerings included Walnut Bars, Walnut Loaves and Fruit Nuts, all made, of course, "from modern recipes with purest and cleanest ingredients under Most Hygienic Conditions"..

Gradually the financial position improved and, by 1937, the directors felt confident enough to invest in an overhaul of the factory, adding a new building and installing a new oven and mixer. The following year a relieved Herbert Hosking could record, with admirable precision, that the firm had reached a new record turnover of £107,633/4/8d. Most of the progress had been made by the wholesale and country department, rather than the café business.

But as things were looking up locally there were ominous rumblings elsewhere in the world. Japan had launched a vicious and bloody invasion of China. In Italy, Mussolini's soldiers were learning to goose-step in preparation for Hitler's visit to Rome. Travellers to Germany reported on its military preparedness, but expressed the rather forlorn hope that this was for defence, not for war. These hopes were dashed in September 1939 when it was Prime Minister Robert Menzies' "melancholy duty" to inform his fellow Australians that, as a consequence of Britain's declaration of war on Germany, Australia was also at war.

Our “Royal Family”

(From *The Balfours Story*, c.1968)

In the Decorating Department the Arts of the Cakemaker and the Confectioner join in ultimate triumph to produce our Royal Family of Christmas, Wedding and Special Occasion Cakes. Among the Royalty you will find now and then a specially designed cake in the shape of an Iced Football or Cricket Bat being dressed for a special Club function.

The King among the cakes is the Christmas Cake, full of the spirit of Christmas and dressed in his seasonal frills and almond icing.

No cake however can match the beauty and real dignity of his Queen – the Wedding Cake, attired for her Wedding in all her royal robes of icing. Since the reign of Charles II, she has reigned supremely over countless thousands of wedding breakfast tables. She is a cake with many secrets, for nothing is spared to make her recipe the richest of all recipes. She is a cake to be remembered for a lifetime and her wardrobe of over thirty different designs are all painstakingly hand made by the confectioners.

The other members of our Royal Family are the Princes and Princesses in the form of special occasion cakes. They are baked and Decorated for the joy of the occasion and smile brightly at the lucky people whose occasion they celebrate.

We have special Cakes for every occasion and our decorating staff, some with over forty years experience, will be pleased to incorporate any individual ideas that you may require when ordering a cake for a special occasion.

Last, but not least important, are the subjects of the iced kingdom in the shape of iced fancies. Gay and Colourful in their party dresses of White, Lemon, Green, Pink and Chocolate coloured Icing, these thousands of little cakes wait in their trays to catch the delighted eyes of a child or adult.

Their destination could be a tea room, a child’s party or a Garden Party at Government House held for the Royal Family. This Department is truly one devoted to occasions and we feel sure that your visit here will be a happy one.

CHAPTER 8

Going Without

For those of us who have never lived through a world war, it's difficult to imagine how much everyday life changed in 1939. With the nation on a wartime footing, the federal government assumed new powers. New regulations controlled every aspect of civilian life, from where you worked and what you earned to where and when the trains ran. Football, racing and other sports were curtailed and even cinema opening hours were regulated. Public buildings and some private homes were requisitioned for military use. Blackout blinds shrouded every window and school children were issued with identity tags in case emergency evacuation was needed. Air raid shelters appeared in back yards and public places, including Adelaide's Victoria Square.

The war presented a whole new set of challenges for Balfours. By March 1940, across Australia, one in six men of military age had enlisted and after the fall of France in 1940 the number volunteers surged. From 1942, when Japan entered the war, all men aged from 18 to 35 and all single men aged up to 45 were called up for military service. The Australian government's manpower edicts also called up men and women to work in munitions manufacture and other essential industries.

Recruiting staff had been no problem during the Depression years, but now skilled bakers, pastrycooks and apprentices were off to war and were difficult to replace. Balfours cafés lost their manager when Wilfred Hosking re-joined the military, assuming the rank of Lieutenant Colonel and taking up a post as Director of Canteen Services. He was not to survive the war. The word came in 1942 that Wilfred had died in Melbourne.

Advertisements for waitresses for the cafés specified women "over 45". This was not an attempt to avoid hiring flighty girls who might have their heads turned by the blandishments of American servicemen on leave. It was because women over 45 were exempted from the laws that made it compulsory for employers to engage labour only through the National Service Offices. Nonetheless, Gordon Wauchope commented on the large tips left by the visiting GIs and the flutter it caused among the café staff.

While the American soldiers may have seemed flush with cash, households were doing it tough. Along with war came food shortages and rationing. Petrol rationing had been introduced in 1940, a move that almost unseated the Menzies coalition government. Clothes rationing followed in 1941. A government advertising campaign featured a nasty cartoon character dubbed the "squander bug" urging people to be thrifty.

Food rationing began with tea, in July 1942. The ration of two ounces a week sorely tested a nation where it was not unusual to consume ten cups of tea a day. A month later, sugar was added to the ration list. Butter was rationed from June 1943 and meat from January 1944. Even foods that were not rationed were often in short supply, particularly milk and eggs. State Egg Controllers were appointed to ensure that vulnerable groups like young children had priority during shortages.

The restrictions affected cafés and restaurants. Although customers weren't required to surrender ration coupons to buy a meal, there were quotas on foods supplied to eating places. As part of the war effort, meals in hotels, restaurants and cafés were restricted to three courses and the Commonwealth Government introduced price controls. After a survey of Adelaide cafés in 1945, the Deputy Price Commissioner approved the going rate for grilled chops at two shillings, while curried crayfish was judged to be fair value at three shillings.

Wartime conditions also had a profound effect on Balfours' factory operations. The shortage of eggs was a particular problem. In 1943, egg supplies were cut by 50 per cent. Instead of egg-rich sponges the bakery increased its focus on yeast-based goods. Letters to customers explained that many products would be unavailable for the foreseeable future. Even the lines the factory was still producing were subject to quotas – a situation that was to persist for some years after the war.

So acute was the shortage of labour in 1942 that the directors decided Balfours would not produce hot cross buns for Easter. Christmas that year was even bleaker. Australia's Minister for War Organisation of Industry, John Dedman, decreed there would be no advertising that Christmas, a ban that earned him the title of "the killer of Santa Claus". In what was normally a peak time for orders, Balfours sent a sad note to their customers:

We regret that, owing to the serious shortage of labour and materials, together with the demand for Cakes to be sent to members of the Fighting Forces, we are unable to accept any orders for the period between 14th to 24th December inclusive. Our Shops are on the "quota" system and sales can only be made while the daily stocks last.

Balfours' staff rallied to the cause, forming a Victory Loan group to buy war bonds. The maintenance men converted delivery trucks from petrol to charcoal gas burners and the drivers struggled to keep their sense of humour intact as they navigated these temperamental machines through Adelaide's streets. And despite difficult times, the firm saw fit to write off a debt of £50 owed by the Liberal Club.

The war effort involved everyone. Women took over many of the jobs previously held by men. Those who weren't in paid employment took up their knitting. By the end of the war, women in the Australian Comforts Fund had knitted 3,085,776 pairs of socks, 1,139,087 balaclavas, 582,610 woollen gloves and 374,677 jumpers. Many a soldier received a Christmas parcel from the Fund containing a Balfours fruit cake and mince pies – a welcome taste of home.

On Wednesday 15 August 1945 came the news that the war had ended. Business at Balfours was suspended and all establishments were closed for two days for the peace celebrations. "For two days and nights, Adelaide has celebrated the return of peace with a joyous enthusiasm such as it has never known before," reported The Advertiser.

At their next meeting, however, Herbert Hosking's minutes sounded a note of caution. The post-war period, he noted, would see continuing shortages and restrictions, and detailed

planning was, for the time being, impossible. Recovering from six years of war would not happen overnight.

His caution was warranted. The first peace-time Christmas for seven years should have provided a bonanza for Balfours as families were reunited in celebration. Instead, a coal strike in New South Wales caused the most severe energy restrictions seen in Australia for decades. Dependent on Newcastle coal, South Australia suffered along with its interstate neighbours. In the bakery, Balfours improvised by fitting some machines with stationary engines, but the loss of production cost the firm dearly. The cafés, too, struggled with the limitations on cooking hours and restrictions on gas and electricity, while the cancellation of weekend train and tram services kept customers at home.

It was not the last time industrial action disrupted business in the post-war period. The next four years saw steel strikes, tramways strikes, slaughtermen's strikes, gas strikes and waterside workers' strikes, culminating in another long-lasting coal strike in 1949. The vagaries of the power supply prompted the factory to install a small auxiliary power plant and the café at 49 Rundle Street to close its Smoke Lounge.

Many raw materials, particularly sugar, remained in short supply, with the last vestiges of food rationing lingering on into 1950. By 1948, though, Balfours could advise their own shops and their wholesale customers that many of their favourite products, from cream sponges and fairy cakes to sultana scones and "midget pies", would no longer be subject to quotas.

Changes were taking place at Board level too. In 1946, for the first time, there was a director who was not related to one of the three founding partners. Victor Bateman was, however, part of the "Balfours family". His father, Joseph, had served as a baker for many years and Vic had followed his father into the firm, working his way up from the factory floor. Then, in 1948, Herbert Hosking departed for an extended overseas trip and Edward "Ted" Williams took his place as Company Secretary, although Herbert remained on the Board.

In 1953 there was also a changing of the guard at the cafés. Miss Warner, manageress of 58 King William Street and Miss Blackeby, shop manageress of 49 Rundle Street, had started working for Balfours within a week of each other in 1909. Now, on the same day, both were retiring. Perhaps the strain of supervising shop girls and waitresses through the American invasion and the arrival of the Coca Cola age had finally proved too taxing. Replacing senior and skilled staff was a challenge, as there had been little trade or business training during the war years.

While the cafés were mostly managed and staffed by women, the bakery was primarily a male domain. Although the machinery had come a long way since James Calder's days, there was still a lot of heavy physical labour involved. Even the skilled decorators were all men, with "the girls" simply adding the flowers and the columns to the elaborate wedding cakes. It wasn't until the 1960s that this began to change.

In the Australia of the 1950s, a woman's place was in the home. Married women who had held down paid jobs during the war settled down to raise families, assisted by a range of

shiny new electrical appliances. This was the decade when most Australian households exchanged the ice chest for a fridge and when car ownership began to climb. These developments transformed the way we shopped and paved the way for the rise of the supermarkets. New suburbs blossomed around major cities as young families pursued the Australian dream of a new home on a quarter acre block. All these changes were to have a profound effect on how Balfours did business.

The city shops and cafés were a cause for increasing concern through the 1950s and beyond. They relied on foot traffic in Adelaide's central business area for their continued success. The replacement of tram routes with bus routes changed shopping patterns, while the high cost of public transport prompted more people to shop in the suburbs. Increased competition, including a new cake shop opened by the Myer department store in 1952, compounded their difficulties.

During the 1950s, concerns grew about the performance of the Balfours cafés. With increases in the State Living Wage, labour costs escalated. Prices for foodstuffs and essentials like glassware and crockery were also increasing. Yet, for the first half of the decade, the Prices Commissioner still controlled what cafés could charge for a meal. Even when price control was removed from café meals and refreshments in 1955, public resistance to higher prices meant profit margins were squeezed.

Tastes were changing too. By 1955 more than a million post-war migrants had arrived in Australia. Along with the British there were Italians, Latvians, Greeks, Dutch, Poles and many others. In Adelaide, as elsewhere, this altered the dining scene dramatically. The traditional tea rooms found themselves competing with the newly trendy coffee lounges and restaurants operated by "New Australians". Despite the installation of new linoleum in the Grill Room and an investment in new silverware, Balfours was struggling to keep pace.

The Directors lamented that "*...the generally weaker trading tone and the growth of coffee lounges has had an effect on our cafes. Two other factors are also affecting the cafes detrimentally as far as the evening meal is concerned. Eating facilities at drive-in picture theatres are receiving considerable support and the increasing number of private means of transport together with parking problems are tending to keep people out of the city.*" They also noted a growth in "carry-away" lunches and resolved to alter the layout of the shops to cater to this trend.

In contrast to the difficulties experienced by the city operations, the wholesale trade was doing well. In the country and in the expanding suburbs, small bakeries and delis proudly advertised that they stocked Balfours products. To meet the growing demand, Gordon Balfour began to expand the bakery. New ovens, new machines and improved refrigeration facilities were installed. The delivery fleet was increased. The company acquired more properties adjacent to the Franklin Street premises and in 1956 the first stage of the two-storey complex in Mellor Street was completed.

By this time, yet another generation of the Wauchope and Balfour families was involved in the firm. Gordon Balfour's son, John, started with the company as an apprentice baker, eventually moving through middle management to become bakery manager. But it was

Gordon Wauchope's son, David, who would have the biggest impact on the firm. In 1949, at the age of 17, he chose to join Balfour Wauchope rather than attend university. Twenty-five years later, he would be head of the company.

In 1954 David followed the example of his father and grandfather and set sail for England on a study tour that would see him work at many leading bakeries. It was the last Balfours business trip to involve an ocean liner. The following year, when Vic Bateman set off for the USA, he travelled by air. At that time, the journey from Sydney to San Francisco took around 30 flying hours and involved fuel stops in Fiji, Canton Island and Hawaii. It would be another three years before Qantas took delivery of its first jet aircraft, the Boeing 707, and began a new era of international air travel.

They were tumultuous times. Along with prosperity and a growing consumerism came the fear of communism and the lurking threat of nuclear war. Queen Elizabeth's visit to Australia in 1954 drew around 75 per cent of the population into the streets just to catch a glimpse of her. Meanwhile Australians were fighting in Korea, missiles were being fired at Woomera and atomic weapons were being tested at Maralinga.

Television arrived in Adelaide in 1959, three years after its launch in Melbourne and Sydney. The launch was not without its hiccups. A fire had destroyed the new studios not long before transmissions were due to commence. But the broadcast went ahead and the new medium allowed advertisers, including food manufacturers, to talk to their customers in a new way.

Driven by changes in technology, innovation was also the catch cry at Balfours. The bakers turned their thoughts to one of the most popular lines: pies. Already, pie production had been transformed from the traditional method that involved bakers pressing pastry with their thumbs into pie trays, ladling in the meat and joining the tops, by hand, to the meat-filled shell. By the late 1950s, pie machines were producing more than 2,800 pies per hour. Then, in 1958, came a breakthrough that meant less waste pastry and faster production. Intended as an efficiency measure, it created a Balfours icon to rival the frog cake: the square pie.

Treats for the Troops

During both world wars, Australians joined in efforts to support the fighting forces. The Australian Comforts Fund was formed in 1914 from an amalgamation of State volunteer bodies. Revived during World War II, the Fund co-ordinated the sending of “food from home” to supplement army rations. Many of these gift hampers contained Balfours cakes and puddings, especially at Christmas.

Individuals were also able to send cakes and hampers to absent servicemen and women, so Balfours developed a special range, assembled the hampers and handled the dispatch themselves. There were two sizes of cake, for 6/9d or 9 shillings, including packing and postage.

Priced at 21 shillings, a large hamper included:

- 1 large cake
- 1 tin meat
- 1 tin malted milk
- 1 tin condensed milk
- 2 packets raisins
- 1 tin Eumenthol Jubes (large)
- 1 packet Butter Menthols
- 1 packet Aspros (large)
- 4 oz. Almonds

Small hampers, for 16/6d, had a similar list of contents, but with a small rather than a large cake and without the raisins and Eumenthol Jubes. Balfours warned that owing to the difficulty of procuring some lines, the contents could be varied but would contain “similar and suitable lines to the same value”. The cakes were packed in special tins and customers were urged to leave a standing order for cakes to be sent at regular intervals.

Jubilee Cake

Balfours Jubilee cake was, for many years, a favourite in the range, but what were its origins? It was certainly a South Australian specialty; if you went looking for Jubilee cake elsewhere in Australia you’d be met with blank looks, although the Western Australians might offer you a Jubilee Twist.

There are those who’ll tell you the Jubilee Cake was invented in 1936 to celebrate 100 years of white settlement in South Australia. They’re only partly right. A light fruit cake recipe published in the 1936 edition of the Green & Gold Cookery Book *is* known as Jubilee Cake. However, the Balfours version was quite different, and had a much longer history.

Like the humbler, home-baked imposter, Balfours Jubilee cake contained fruit, was topped with icing and was commonly served with butter. But it was made with yeast, making it a cross between a bread and a cake. And its history reached back at least as far as 1912, when it featured in price lists and catering menus. In the early 1950s, Balfours cafés offered

it toasted for 1/2d. The origin may date back to Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897, but we can't be sure.

Christmas Cheer

For bakers in the British and European traditions, Christmas is always a busy time. Germany has its Stollen, Italy its Panettone, Norway and Denmark their Julekake. From the earliest days of Balfours, Scottish shortbreads, mince pies and puddings were produced in their thousands to celebrate the festive season.

It was a tradition the company continued, each year producing special treats for Christmas. In 1930, the prices of Christmas hampers ranged from five shillings for a cake, four mince pies and a sprig of holly, to £1 for a cake, 12 mince pies, shortbread, a walnut gateau, a box of chocolates, a plum pudding and a large pack of fruit and nuts. And the all-important sprig of holly. Some hampers included a Dundee cake – a rich fruit cake topped with almonds that harked back to Balfours' Scottish beginnings.

In later years, the Christmas cakes became more elaborate. Taking pride of place were the iced cakes, "containing the choicest of ingredients and loaded with luscious fruits and nuts" and decorated with "Christmas effects" and paper frills. The Scotch shortbreads were made the traditional way: with butter. In the 1970s, Christmas puddings contained Bundaberg rum, and at least one baker was known to have sampled a few capfuls during the mixing process.

Today, Balfours continues to produce a seasonal range of light and dark Christmas fruit cakes, Christmas puddings and specialty mince pies.

CHAPTER 8

Our Original Fast Food

Ask anyone in Australia “What’s our national dish?” and more often than not the answer will be “the meat pie”. Australia’s relationship with the pie goes back to mother England, where the word ‘pye’ first entered the language in the 14th century. The early English pies weren’t famed for their succulent flaky crust though. Like the Romans and the Greeks before them, medieval pie-makers saw the pastry as a kind of makeshift casserole dish, which was generally thrown away after the contents were devoured.

The pie arrived in Australia with the first colonists. Pies were on the menu of Sydney’s first official banquet held to celebrate King’s birthday in June 1788, although what they contained is not recorded. In the early 19th century, the streets of our cities rang with the cries of roving pie sellers. Local wits speculated about the contents of their wares, noting the disappearance of neighbourhood cats. Hygiene was dubious – sellers would pierce the top of each pie with a thumb, topping up the contents from a jug of ‘gravy’ which was most likely just salty water.

In Adelaide, too, the pie arrived with the first white settlers and by 1840 at least one Hindley Street baker was offering “mutton pies every day at 12 o’clock, and on Wednesday and Saturday evenings at 7 o’clock”. When James Calder started his Rundle Street shop, pies were among his wares. Unsurprisingly, given the firm’s Scottish origins, the specialty at Calder & Balfours tea rooms was the Scotch pie. It later became a staple at Elizabeth Balfour’s café and for decades Balfours had both Scotch and English pies on the menu.

Although Scotch Pies no longer appear in the Balfours range and seem to have vanished from Australia, they’re still around in Scotland where there is even a Scotch Pie Club, headquartered near Edinburgh. Assuming that the traditional recipe hasn’t changed too much, James Calder’s Scotch pies would have been round rather than oval in shape and baked in a straight-sided tin like that of the English pork pie. The filling would be mutton rather than beef and highly spiced with pepper. It’s also likely that the recipe for the pastry was different, producing a harder, less flaky crust. In traditional Scotch pies, the top crust is about a centimetre lower than the sides of the pie, creating a recessed top to hold peas, mashed potato, beans or gravy.

The English pie, we can only assume, was similar to the slope-sided, meat and gravy-filled classic we know today. Particularly popular in northern England (still home to the World Pie-eating Championships) pies were often accompanied by mushy peas.

Which brings us to that South Australian icon, the pie floater. The upside-down pie floating in a puddle of pea soup continues to fascinate or perhaps horrify those who haven’t grown up with the concept. It’s unclear who invented the pie floater although some attribute it to a Port Pirie baker, Ern “Shorty” Bradley. In the early 1900s he was advertising his coffee stall and dispensing “Hot Pies and Pasties a Specialty. Hot Saveloys, Rolls and Floaters”.

Coffee stalls (aka pie carts) had been around in Adelaide since the 1860s. The horse-drawn carts provided late night sustenance for cab drivers, theatre-goers and citizens of dubious character. There were regular complaints from local residents and businesses about the noise, the litter and even the tendency of patrons to “scrawl obscenities on the windows with greasy pie crusts”.

In the late 1900s there were as many as 13 pie carts dotted around the city, including one operated by the Gibbs family of whom we will soon hear more. But in 1938 the city council, possibly tired of dealing with all those complaints, decided to phase the carts out. By 1958 there were only two: one outside the GPO in Victoria Square, the other outside the railway station on Adelaide’s North Terrace.

The station pie cart (or, more properly pie carts, as updated versions replaced the original) was an Adelaide institution. Patronised by the Premier of South Australia in the early 1900s, over the years it survived an attack from an escaped bull, pranks by high-spirited university students and noise complaints from the swanky Grosvenor Hotel. In the early 1980s a Council edict compelled the cart to close at 11.30pm. A lengthy battle then played out in Council and even on the floor of the South Australian Parliament, but by 1986 the owner, Charles Oram, had won approval for all-night trading.

One great institution deserves another. In 1987, Balfours announced that they had bought Oram’s Oven Door Pie Cart and the licence to trade outside the railway station. It was a far cry from the company’s other retail establishments. The hours of business normally ranged from around 6pm until 5am and the cart operated 364 days a year, closing only on Christmas Day. Of course, by then, all the cart’s pie floaters featured Balfour’s distinctive square pies.

But the pie cart itself had seen better days. Under the supervision of Dean Evans, a Balfours employee since the mid-50s, a new cart took shape, its design based on that of Adelaide’s famous Red Hen railway carriages. The launch of the Great South Australian Pie Cart took place on Thursday 30 June, 1988 and its first pie floater was served to South Australia’s Minister for Tourism, Ms. Barbara Weise. For the next 17 years, a valiant band of Balfours employees would work through the small hours to ensure Adelaide’s shift workers and late-night party goers had their floater fix.

By 1998, the Balfours Pie Cart was selling around 40,000 pie floaters a year. Famous patrons included rock legend Joe Cocker and comedian Billy Connolly and, on one occasion, a visiting group of executives from Malaysian airlines who enjoyed a black tie event, complete with floaters and Cooper’s ale. According to a company newsletter, the record for eating a Balfours pie floater was 12.1 seconds, set at the Royal Adelaide Show in 1996.

In 2005 the pie cart was sold to Skycity Casino, who proposed to maintain it as a tourist attraction outside the casino. Sadly, the City Council had other ideas and the permit was refused. The last remaining pie cart in the city closed down in 2010.

Of course, there’s another kind of pastry that has a special place in South Australia. While the Scots brought us their pies, the Cornish brought us their pasties. A study in 2006 found

that 10 per cent of South Australians had significant Cornish ancestry and six of the top ten surnames in the state were Cornish, well above the national average. There's even a Cornish festival, or "kernewek lowender" on regional South Australia's Copper Coast every year.

There's a saying in Cornwall that "a mine is a hole anywhere in the world with at least one Cornishman at the bottom of it!" The discovery of copper at Kapunda and Burra, South Australia, in the 1840s attracted Cornish miners eager to escape the depressed conditions at home. The pasty was their traditional lunchtime dish, often baked with meat and potatoes at one end and a sweet filling like apple at the other. The thick crimped crust allowed miners to hold the pasty with dirty fingers, discarding the last bit to placate the "knockers" – evil spirits who lived in the depths of the mine.

Balfours, too, has a Cornish as well as a Scottish heritage, thanks to the merger with Bricknell's all those years ago. And since the earliest days, pies, pasties and sausage rolls have been a part of the range, sold through their own shops, served up in the cafés or despatched to wholesale customers.

Initially, the range was limited. There were English pies, Scotch pies, pasties and sausage rolls. By the 1930s, daintier offerings included cocktail pies, cocktail pasties, and "midget" sausage rolls. The terminology changed with time. The cocktail pies and pasties became midget pies and pasties in the 1950s, finally adopting the more familiar "party pies" identity in the 1960s. There was a bit of a hiccup in pasty production in 1951. A poor growing season the previous year had led to a severe potato shortage and during the peak winter season pasty lovers had to go without – or switch to pies.

The introduction of the square pie in 1958 turned out to be one of Gordon Balfour's best decisions. Its launch followed his fact-finding trips to Melbourne and Sydney. Gordon worked closely with David Wauchope to develop the pie, which was initially manufactured by Bill Cowley of Cowley's Bakeries on updated, high speed machinery. "People in the industry cooperated with one another back in those days," David Wauchope recalls. "It was a much friendlier time."

Although the square shape was mainly intended to use pastry more efficiently, the Balfours square pie captured local imaginations and became another South Australian icon. In 1967, on Channel 9's *Newsbeat* program, Adelaide columnist and commentator Max Harris suggested (no doubt tongue-in-cheek) that Gordon deserved a knighthood for introducing it.

Cautiously, Balfours began to extend their pastry range. The Square Curry Pie appeared in 1961 only to be replaced by the Square Savoury Pie in 1963, the same year the first Family Plate Pie joined the range. But by the end of the 1960s, there were more than a dozen variations, large and small, from Pizza Pies to Country Meat & Kidney, Curry & Rice Pies to Pasty Plates.

From that time on, it has been a story of innovation. The Microwave Pie, introduced in 1989, was believed to be a national, or perhaps international, first. After 30 prototypes, the product

research and development team believed they had developed a pastry that would stay firm in a microwave oven without special packaging or absorbent wrapping.

Later came the oval-shaped footy pie, a natural development from Balfours' long term support of Adelaide's Aussie Rules football teams. And thanks to new freezing equipment, Balfours pies popped up outside South Australia, in hallowed sporting venues like the Sydney Cricket Ground, AAMI Stadium in Melbourne and Kardinia Park, home of the Geelong Cats.

Gourmet flavours have come and gone, with the Pie of the Month program allowing Balfours to experiment with more exotic ingredients. In 2013, the Red Thai Chicken Pie prompted one particularly enthusiastic online review:

This pie has given me a new level of appreciation for well-made chicken pies. This pie is filled to the brim with real shredded chicken, spiced with authentic-tasting red Thai sauce. The fact that this pie is loaded with real chunks of soft chicken is really something to be mentioned. Almost all chicken pies either have processed chicken, or what looks or tastes like moldy cardboard.... I recommend Balfours Red Thai Chicken pie to anyone who has lost faith in chicken pies. There is hope.

Moving with the times, Balfours now offers vegan pies and pasties as well as the old favourites.

CHAPTER 9

Dollars and Donuts

While the arrival of the square pie in 1958 was certainly a milestone in Balfours' history, another event in that year was also significant for the company. In August, Herbert Hosking resigned from the Board and retired. It was 65 years since Fred Bricknell had first employed him and 44 years since he negotiated the successful Balfours/Bricknell's merger. While the company never bore his name, he was undoubtedly a significant force behind its success.

There was someone more than ready to fill that vacant Board seat: David Wauchope. Unlike his cousin John Balfour, who left the organisation in his mid-30s, David would go on to transform the nature of the company in years to come. While his father, Gordon, was primarily concerned with the cafés and retail stores, David was a baker through-and-through. Following in his uncle Mac's footsteps, he would be responsible for bringing Balfours into the modern age.

It was a timely appointment. The 1960s was a turbulent decade, when the old conservative values were challenged by the rise of a new generation. These were the baby boomers. Their political leanings, their spending power and their tastes in music, entertainment, clothing and food would shape Australian society for decades.

The '60's began with a significant change in food retailing. In 1960, both Coles and Woolworths opened their first freestanding supermarkets, complete with car parking – Coles in suburban Melbourne, Woolworths in a suburb of Wollongong. Woolworths arrived in Adelaide the same year and Coles a few years later. The South Australian Foodland chain appeared in 1962 and three years later the discount supermarket Tom the Cheap was opening South Australian branches.

By the end of the decade the supermarkets had grabbed a substantial share of Australia's food sales. Often, they were located in the new regional shopping centres, like Melbourne's Chadstone, opened in 1960 with parking for 2500 cars. In Adelaide, the Arndale Shopping Centre, opened in 1963, boasted of being Australia's first fully enclosed, air conditioned shopping mall. The new centres accelerated the move away from inner-city shopping.

The immediate concern for Balfours, however, was the 1960 credit squeeze. Otherwise known as the "Holt jolt", this was a reaction by Robert Menzies' Liberal government to the galloping inflation and unbridled spending that followed the ending of import licensing. The federal Treasurer, Harold Holt (who was to disappear, presumed drowned before the end of the decade) became the most unpopular man in Australia as his mini-budget reduced tax deductions on borrowings by business, raised some sales taxes and caused banks to increase overdraft rates and cut lending.

Balfours noted a marked slowing down in business activities and attributed it to the reduced purchasing power of the community and the general quietness of the city. The shops and cafés suffered. The unit value of sales was low, while the cost of labour was high. And tastes were changing. Iced cakes were suffering because of a preference for un-iced cakes and

with more women joining the work force the tradition of afternoon tea was in decline. Balfours needed a winner.

In 1963, Gordon Balfour set off once more for overseas. He was away for seven months, studying factory layout and planning, packaging and distribution, advertising, and keeping an eye out for new lines to add to the range. Was it during that trip that he spotted what would become one of Balfours' best sellers? We can't say for sure, but by 1965 new machinery was installed and a new product was added to the range: donuts.

The 1965 price list shows just two varieties of donut, pineapple and cinnamon, selling for sixpence each. Sales must have been encouraging, because the following year two more flavours were added: iced and coconut donuts. And the pricing had changed. Thanks to inflation and the introduction of decimal currency in February 1966, all varieties were offered at the premium price of seven cents, a 40 per cent increase on the old price. It must have more than the market would bear, as the price was promptly reduced to a more reasonable six cents.

In 1967 came the launch of that all-time favourite: the Balfours chocolate donut. Now, more than 50 years later, Balfours produces more than 1.7 million chocolate donuts every year and they're up there with square pies and custard tarts as one of the company's top selling lines.

The success of the donuts in delicatessens, school and factory canteens and country stores highlighted the need to change the focus of the Balfours business away from the company-owned cafés and shops. In 1966, the Windsor Café closed. It was a time when many of the old shops, hotels and theatres along Rundle Street were disappearing, to be replaced by modern stores and car parks.

The mood in South Australia had changed, too, with the election of a Labor government in 1965. For more than 26 years, the figure of Premier Sir Thomas Playford had loomed over state politics. His Liberal Country League government had been a driving force behind South Australia's economic growth since 1938 – a growth rate considerably higher than in the rest of Australia. But Playford and his party were socially conservative. He was a teetotaler, opposed the relaxation of licensing laws and believed women should devote themselves to home and family.

The Balfours culture through the Playford years had reflected the general conservatism that is often associated with the "city of churches". As with many family businesses, the principals set the tone. Loyalty was expected, and given. A respectful distance was preserved between the Wauchopes and Balfours and their employees. Gordon Balfour – always "Mr Balfour" to his staff – would walk through the factory every morning at nine o'clock. Tall, thin and dressed in black, his shoes polished to a mirror finish, he was a daunting figure to the workers. Managers might get a brief "Good morning" but few would dare try to engage him in conversation. At the café, where he took his lunch each day, the staff made note of the "special coffee for Mr Balfour": a Tanganyika and Jamaican Blue Mountain blend.

Although relationships remained formal, there were many instances when the Directors offered financial assistance and support to staff members going through difficult times. “There was a lot of compassion there,” one long-term employee commented. For many, a job with Balfours was a job for life. Newsletters from the 1960s record some extraordinary stories of long service. Herbert Schroder, for example, joined the company as a driver when deliveries were made by horse-drawn vehicles and retired at the age of 82, having given the company the best 64 years of his life. Ellison Pitt, after 50 years of service, was still going strong as Sales Manager.

Gordon Wauchope had been part of the company for 46 years and Chairman for 30 years when, in 1966, he died. He was just 62. Gordon Balfour assumed the Chair, a position he held for the next six years, while maintaining his involvement with the daily affairs of the bakery. He remained a stickler for quality. “You got that feeling about him, that he wasn’t worried about the money or anything, it was just his products and they had to be excellent and that’s what he was there for,” one of the factory staff remembered.

In an interview conducted as part of an oral history project for the City of Adelaide, another staff member gave an example of Gordon’s attention to detail.

“When we did something as a Balfour’s standard it becomes part and parcel of you. I still look at these Kitchener buns today and I go past sometimes and I want to pat them down. I’ll tell you the reason. A Kitchener bun is a round ball of dough, you cut it in half and then you put cream in it. ... but when you opened up the jaws and you’d got this cream, you’ve got an area at the top and at the bottom that is exposed to the air. Now, if we did that when we were young and left that exposed like that, that was a no-no. You had to push that down so that the cream came right to the edge of the cut so that nothing in that area would dry out.”

(Dean Evans, 2002)

In the early 1970s, Balfours produced a booklet given to groups touring the factory. Tracing the manufacturing process from purchasing through product research and development to production and delivery, it gives an insight into the company’s operations at the time. We learn, for example, that Balfours was the largest egg user in South Australia, had the busiest private switchboard in Adelaide and that the company had to design its own pie-making machinery to keep up with demand.

There were more than six hundred employees, including 130 who worked in the cafés and shops, and the delivery fleet numbered more than a hundred vehicles. Balfours’ goods were supplied to all parts of South Australia, the Northern Territory as far as Darwin, and the western parts of Victoria and New South Wales. According to the booklet, the cake shop at 72 Rundle Street enjoyed the reputation of being the busiest cake shop in the Southern Hemisphere, although it’s not clear how that astonishing statistic was arrived at.

To maintain a business of such size, Balfours needed to adapt to a rapidly changing society. In 1967, South Australia had become the last Australian state to abandon six o’clock closing for pubs, ending the infamous “six o’clock swill”. There were new sounds in music. The Beatles drew crowds of screaming girls during their Australian tour and an Adelaide rock

group, The Masters Apprentices, took Australia by storm. Young people were growing their hair, drinking espresso in Italian-owned coffee bars and, by the end of the 1960s, protesting against the call-up and Australia's involvement in the Vietnam war.

The South Australian state election in 1970 marked the beginning of the "Dunstan era". Premier Don Dunstan and his Labor government transformed South Australia with electoral reform, the abolition of the death penalty, the recognition of Aboriginal rights and many other socially progressive measures. The new government brought change to Balfours' doorstep, turning Rundle Street into Rundle Mall. Initiated in 1972, the mall was officially opened in September 1976.

Dunstan encouraged multiculturalism, particularly as it applied to food. In 1968 Adelaide had just 22 licensed restaurants; by 1977 there were nearly 200. But smart restaurants weren't the only new arrivals on the food scene. In 1968, the first Kentucky Fried Chicken store had opened its doors in Sydney. Within three years it had been joined by McDonald's and Pizza Hut, and Hungry Jacks had opened in Perth. Adelaide had its own Burger King chain, opened by a local entrepreneur to pre-empt the American fast food giant. The fast food franchises quickly established themselves as a convenient choice for casual eating.

The new culinary diversity of the 1970s did not sit well with the traditional menus of Balfours cafés, although, judging by nostalgic social media comments, they remained a favourite destination for mums and grannies with small children in tow and country people visiting the city. In 1972 Balfours agreed to sell the King William Street site of the Grand Café to developers. The café lingered on until the building was demolished in 1974 as part of a project that created the Southern Cross Arcade. Balfours was guaranteed a spot in the new arcade, but decided on a shop rather than a café.

Balfours had embraced the move to suburban shopping when, in 1970, Gordon Balfour negotiated the lease of a shop in the new Myer Shopping Centre called Tea Tree Plaza, in Modbury north east of Adelaide. He was gratified to hear, two years later that the shop's sales growth had outstripped that of any other food outlet in the centre.

And Balfours was looking ahead. In the early 1970s the company acquired shares in another Adelaide pie-maker, Glover Gibbs, entering into an agreement to build a new factory at Glynde. Like Balfours, Glover Gibbs had a Scottish heritage. James Cross Gibbs arrived in Adelaide in 1883 from Dunbar, Scotland, and established one of Adelaide's earliest pie stalls, selling pies and pasties produced in his brother Jack's Rundle Street bakery. His sons continued in the bakery trade and Gibb's Pie Cart was for many years a fixture in Port Adelaide.

In the 1930s James's grandson, Harry, began mechanised pie and pasty production, building the machinery himself, and in 1956 Glover Gibbs Pty Limited began operations in a factory at Rose Park. The agreement with Balfours allowed the company to expand its manufacturing operations. Completed in February 1972, the Glynde facility was developed as a modern frozen food and export establishment. It was to play an important role in Balfours' future.

Sadly, although he was instrumental in making these changes, Gordon Balfour did not live to see the results. He resigned from the Board in 1972 and, three years later, he died. This left just one of Elizabeth Balfour's descendants, David Wauchope, to take the company into its next phase – and into the computer age.

Tripe on Toast?

The Balfours Café price list from 1963 reveals a menu that made few concessions to an increasingly multicultural society. There were a lot of toast options. As an alternative to tripe and onions, you could order your toast topped with eggs, devilled kidneys, mince with egg, tomatoes and bacon, sardines, or herrings with tomato. Main courses were stubbornly English, the only cross-cultural influences being Pasty with Spaghetti (!) and a Sweet Curry with Rice & Fruit Chutney.

Other dishes, listed in a strangely American fashion as “entrées”, were:

| | |
|--|-----|
| Stewed Lamb with Mashed Potatoes and Green Peas | 4/- |
| Pork Sausages with Mashed Potatoes and Apple Sauce | 4/- |
| Crumbed Sausages with Mashed Potatoes and Sauce | 4/- |
| Lamb's Fry & Bacon with Mashed Potatoes | 4/- |
| Braised Steak with Mashed Potatoes | 4/- |
| Steak & Kidney Pie with Vegetables | 4/- |
| Square Pie with Baked Beans | 2/6 |
| Ham & Veal with Vegetables | 4/- |
| Potato Pie with Vegetables | 4/- |

If you were feeling flush, you could opt for Crayfish Mayonnaise for 7/6d (75 cents) or, for something light, a Brain & Bacon Sandwich for just 1/8d (around 17 cents). By 1969, the list of entrées had been expanded to include Brain Patties with Mashed Potatoes and Salmon Rissoles with Anchovy Sauce & Mashed Potatoes. Prices for these and most of the other entrées were, by then, 58 cents. But the Pasty with Spaghetti was still a good buy at 29 cents.

The long list of desserts included a range of cakes, pies and tarts as well as trifles, fruit salad, Peach Pavlova with Ice Cream and Banana Splits. The prices sound ridiculously cheap, but when you consider that the weekly wage for a skilled tradesman was around £21 (or \$42) a week and the basic (male) wage an even lower £14/3/- (\$28.30), it makes that Crayfish Mayonnaise an indulgence indeed.

The Custard Tart Revived

Few pastries could have such an enthusiastic fan base as the Balfours Custard Tart. South Australians exiled to far-flung corners of the nation or the world pine for what they say is a tart unmatched by any other. In a moment of candour, one of the Balfours bakers once revealed that the difference lies in the milk, but remained close-mouthed about other trade secrets.

But it seems that the famous custard tart disappeared from the range entirely for almost two decades. There is evidence for its existence in the 1930s: a recipe for the filling in a hand-

written notebook and a presence in an old price list. But from the early 1940s until the early 1960s, it went missing. Price lists through the 1950s and until 1961 mention raspberry, apricot, lemon and black currant (cryptically described as B.C.) tarts. But no custard.

Then, in 1963, the custard tart made a triumphant return at the most reasonable price of seven cents. The most likely explanation for its prolonged absence is the egg shortage that began with World War II and continued for some time thereafter. You can't make a good custard tart without eggs. Fortunately, more than 50 years on, the custard tart remains as popular as ever, with more than 50,000 being produced every week. A new chocolate version was launched in June 2018 – available in South Australia and New South Wales.

Building a Bigger Donut

Some people trace the history of the donut back to the ancient Romans, who used to fry strips of bread dough and dip them in syrups. But the donuts we know today came to us by way of the Dutch (who called them “oily cakes” and fried them in lard) and, reputedly, an American ship's captain who came up with the idea of the hole in the middle.

The first donut machine was invented in 1920 in New York by a Russian refugee called Adolph Levitt. However, donuts were little known in Australia until after World War II. Even then, they failed to become as popular as they were in America where, so a Balfours newsletter asserts, they were “eaten on almost every conceivable occasion, Breakfast, Morning Coffee, Lunch, Afternoon Tea and Supper”.

Although, as far as we know, Balfours Donuts didn't make it to the breakfast table, they soon became a favourite for the mid-morning tea break or lunchtime treat. And children, especially, loved the chocolate ones. Competitors, anxious to cash in on the trend, began offering bigger donuts and the cry came from the sales team, “Can you make ours bigger?” It was a problem. The machine that extruded the dough couldn't easily be modified to increase the size.

Eventually, the solution was found with a new machine, installed in Balfours' Sydney factory. But that created a new problem for the sales people. “Now the mums are buying one, breaking it in half, and giving the kids half each,” they wailed. But whether shared or scoffed, donuts continue to be among Balfours' most popular lines.

CHAPTER 10

The Japanese Mexicana

Many who worked at Balfour Wauchope during the late 1970s and 1980s describe it as a thrilling period, with a lot of opportunity for promotion within the company and encouragement to come up with new ideas. The man behind this new sense of momentum was David Wauchope. Taking over from Ted Williams as Managing Director in 1975, David had a vision for Balfours that extended far beyond South Australian borders.

These were not the easiest of times for a manufacturer. The Whitlam Labor Government, elected in 1972, had made significant reforms, including introducing universal health insurance, abolishing university fees, ending conscription and legislating for equal pay for women. However, it was struggling to manage the economy. By mid-1974, Australia was in recession. After the controversial dismissal of Labor in November 1975, Malcolm Frazer's Liberal government had little more success in curbing rampant inflation and climbing unemployment.

Undaunted, David Wauchope had sufficient faith in the business to take on twelve apprentices in 1977. Initially, an apprenticeship meant moving from one department to another and learning on the job. At times, the training involved rough discipline. "In the old days you'd get a kick up the bum and you'd get a slap on the head and 'You do that'. Well, you can't do those these days," recalled a former apprentice.

Even in the late 1970s there was no formal training available for bakers. David set about changing this. Working with others in the industry, he took a leading role in setting up a trade school for bakers, helping to develop the syllabus and remaining as its chairman for many years. The rough and ready approach to training was soon replaced by more respectful relationships and many Balfours apprentices went on to win awards for their work.

In another giant step towards making Balfours more efficient, in 1977 the company installed its first computer. The World Wide Web was still 13 years away and the first personal computer, the Commodore PET (Personal Electronic Transactor) had just been released. It had a giant 8kB of memory. Nonetheless, David saw the future and it was electronic. He appointed a General Manager, John Murray, whose task was to computerise the company. In the Balfours tradition of working with the best, industry pioneer IBM was contracted to develop a customised program. The result was Computabake, billed as "the complete bakery management system".

At the dawn of the 1980s, Balfours was a company with over 600 product lines, delivering daily to hundreds of customers over a wide geographic area. What's more, most of the products were fresh and had a short shelf life. The logistics were, to say the least, challenging.

Computabake was a data entry system that coordinated the purchasing, production, sales and distribution functions. It stored recipes and costing details, summarised production

requirements based on order information and even produced product distribution summaries and packing slips. The management reporting function provided reports on production efficiency as well as tracking inventory, costs, sales and profit margins. For its time, it was revolutionary.

The Computabake system took five years to develop and around six months of training to have running smoothly. After that, however, it became a very saleable product in its own right. In 1983, Balfours took a stand at IBA, the triennial international bakery fair held in Munich, and presented proposals to Unilever and to the British group United Biscuits. While it took some time for these efforts to bear fruit, the Computabake software was eventually sold and installed in both West Germany and the USA.

There were many other expansionary initiatives during this period. In 1981, Balfour Wauchope acquired the remaining shares in Glover Gibbs and, as a result, ownership of the Glynde factory. This was a further step towards fulfilling David Wauchope's burning ambition to enter the export market.

The Balfours city bakery had expanded in stages over decades and many parts of the building were old. Despite the obsession with hygiene instilled by Gordon Balfour, its rambling layout made it hard to meet the efficiency standards required to gain an export licence. The Glynde factory, on the other hand, was a modern facility with up-to-date equipment and freezing works. This investment was to pay dividends in 1987, when the Glynde bakery was granted its export licence. Balfours further diversified their business, and export potential in 1983 by acquiring the engineering firm Charles Grant (Holdings) Pty Ltd, who manufactured baking equipment.

Meanwhile, Balfours continued to explore new product and distribution ideas. The cream-filled "lamington style" donut was the most successful launch in 1983. Through an agreement with Alaska Foods Balfours began to distribute Golden crumpets, flapjacks and muffins. And a contract with Coles saw the company producing the house brand Farmland cakes. David Wauchope's industry standing was second to none when he became Chairman of the Australian Society of Baking, an affiliate of the American Society of Baking Engineers.

In 1985, David made his first foray into Victoria, with the purchase of a bakery in Melbourne. The "Balfours Natural" range was presented at the Royal Melbourne Show and the Melbourne facility went on to produce a new range of hot cross buns. Traditionalists might throw up their hands in horror, but Apple Hot Cross Buns and Raspberry Hot Cross Buns were produced at the instigation of a Coles buyer. Balfours was appointed as a preferred supplier to all Coles Metropolitan Melbourne stores for Easter 1987. So successful were the flavoured buns that Balfours decided to add them to the South Australian range the following year. At this point, Balfours' sales to Coles and Woolworths totalled more than \$1 million.

Meanwhile, bigger plans were afoot. In June 1986 Balfours took over a struggling Melbourne bakery business, Food Kitchens of Australia. Food Kitchens had been formed some years previously when a group of businessmen bought out three local businesses, Stacks Pies (with a history stretching back to 1925), Weiss Cakes (founded in 1899) and the more recently established French Food Company. The product range included bread, pastries, continental

cakes, croissants, donuts and frozen pizza bases. Balfours transferred the Victorian distribution centre to the Food Kitchens of Australia factory at Murrumbena, a suburb south east of Melbourne and set about making the operation more efficient.

If David Wauchope's eyes were on Melbourne in the mid-1980s, the eyes of the world were on Adelaide. In 1985, the Australian Grand Prix arrived. Held at the beginning of November, it was the final round of the FIA Formula One World Championship and the city was in party mode. In Adelaide it wouldn't be a party without Balfours, so it was no surprise that the company was appointed to cater for the crowds. That first year, coping with an estimated 50,000 visitors required 14 caravans and 80 gas and electric pie warmers, to dish up around 65,000 pies, pasties and sausage rolls.

The Grand Prix remained in Adelaide until 1995 and became a catalyst for new product development at Balfours. This was in the hands of an elite team of Balfours bakers. Calling themselves the "Thistle Bakery" or "Roy's Own Royal Thistleers" (in deference to Bakeries Manager Roy O'Leary) this bakery within a bakery boasted that their motto was "Nothing is beyond us".

In 1988 the special range the Thistleers produced for the race was marketed nationally through caterers. It included Black Forest Torten Bar, three types of Gateaux Bar (strawberry, mandarin and melon), three types of quiche, (asparagus, mushroom and quiche Lorraine) and Cheese Stix. Each year, one of the Balfours decorators created a cake in the shape of the previous year's winning car, which was proudly displayed in the window at 72 Rundle Mall.

The Balfours caravans were a familiar sight at all kinds of events, from the Royal Adelaide Show to the South Australian Golf Championships. In 1987 Balfours was contracted to cater for a once-in-a-lifetime occasion: a Papal mass at Victoria Park Racecourse. Five loaves and two fishes were judged not to be sufficient to feed the 200,000 people who attended, so seven caravans were deployed to dispense pies and pasties to the faithful.

However, David Wauchope had an ambition to feed even more people. In the mid-1980s Japan had a population of around 122.1 million. This was the export market Balfours targeted, with a special range of products developed to appeal to Japanese tastes. Strangely, the product chosen to lead the push into Japan was the one known locally as the Mexicana pie, with its distinctly spicy meat filling.

The Glynde bakery received its export licence in 1987 making Glover Gibbs the only export registered bakery in South Australia. Soon after, David was talking to the Japanese about export. On 16 December the bakery began production of the first full container load of export pies destined for Japan. The order consisted of beef pies, curry pies, savoury egg pies and a range of party pies including the Mexicana variety. The Mexicana accounted for more than 40 per cent of the first order.

Two Japanese businessmen flew into Adelaide for a ceremony to mark the occasion. The South Australian Premier, John Bannon, put the "Australia inspected" stamp on the first carton of pies to come off the packing line, then David Wauchope and the Leader of the Opposition, John

Olsen, added their signatures. The empty carton is now reputedly on display in the Goryu Museum in Okayama, Japan. Around 100,000 pies were shipped to Osaka for distribution through snack bars and a Balfours pie shop was subsequently opened in the Japanese city of Kobe.

In the years to come, the “Thistleers” developed further specialised products for the Japanese market. Never seen in Australia, the hexagonal Mexicana pie (dubbed “The Hexy” by Balfours bakers) was a feature of the range. There were also plain, garlic and herb Butter Leaves, croissants, fruit pies, muffins and a range of more than 40 savoury pastries. Back home in South Australia, locals had to be content with the attractively named “Snag Bag” – a Kransky sausage encased in pastry.

In Adelaide, the retail arm of Balfours was expanding beyond the CBD with a new shop opened at Glenelg and a shop at the Marion Shopping Centre (now Westfield) at Oaklands. The shop in the Southern Cross Arcade was closed for renovations and opened a year later with a new look. In 1988, the freehold of the property at 72 Rundle Mall was sold and leased back by Balfours. The café was temporarily closed, to reopen in the early 1990s as Balfours BakeCafé.

A company newsletter from 1988 noted that “food service”, which was the new name for catering, offered significant market potential for frozen product. Employing a distribution company and a merchandising company, Balfours set out to capture more of that market with Gibbs’ frozen range. The Balfours “Snack-time” range of snack pies was backed by a substantial advertising campaign, attracting strong interest in South Australia and interstate. It seemed everything was going well. But trouble was lurking in the wings.

In Australia, the 1980s was the time of the “corporate raider”. Men like Alan Bond, Christopher Skase and Robert Holmes a Court were plundering private companies to build business empires. Ron Brierly’s Industrial Equity Limited was the third-largest company listed on the Australian stock exchange. The hot term was “leverage”, which usually meant borrowing on an unprecedented scale. Even the South Australian Government was caught up in the new aggressive business approach, via the newly created State Bank of South Australia led by Tim Marcus Clark.

Unlike the raiders, with their “greed is good” philosophy, David Wauchope was a man with a strict moral code. For him, the business was about more than money, it was about people. Many of the Balfours staff were long-term employees and David viewed them almost as an extended family. Looking at the corporate carnage around him, and ignoring the disastrous stock market crash of 1987, he sought to secure their future by concentrating 100 per cent of the shareholding within the Wauchope family.

Since the merger of Balfours and Bricknell’s back in 1914, the Balfours Share Trust had made it possible for many staff members to have a stake in the success of the company. Now, one by one, they sold their shares to the Wauchopes. Members of the Balfour family also accepted an offer by David and his wife Jan.

Jan Wauchope, qualified in catering and management, became a Director. Their children were also called upon to take time out from their professions to join the company. Unlike

David himself, who had joined Balfours as an apprentice baker, his children included a doctor, a physiotherapist and an IT professional. Just one son, Anthony, chose to follow in his father's footsteps and become a baker.

In a newsletter, David explained the thinking behind the consolidation of the shareholding and promised a bright future.

"Family companies, like families, have a great deal going for them – the greatest being the bond of care for each person, especially in tough times when the proverb runs true – that blood is thicker than water," he wrote.

"When they succeed over many generations it is because each generation makes a fresh start at applying the original worthwhile values and traditions in an appropriate way for the present and the future. Therefore we will continue to aim at combining professionalism and progressiveness with the un-compromised standards of upfront integrity, quality goods and services, and care of people within and without the company."

David and Jan were, by now, committed Christians and sought divine guidance for many company decisions. Even deciding which charities would receive company support was put in the hands of the Lord. To help the staff cope with the changes in management, they employed a company chaplain and produced a mission statement proclaiming that "our company head is Jesus Christ" and the company vision was to "Love GOD and love your neighbour as yourself".

By 1990, David could announce that he and his wife owned 100 per cent of Balfour Wauchope. It was to emerge, however, that this, plus the plans to make Balfours a truly national brand, meant incurring a significant debt. And by 1991 the government-owned State Bank, the company's major creditor, was in desperate straits itself. With an estimate \$2.5 million in doubtful debts the bank collapsed, bringing down with it the Premier, John Bannon, and eventually the Labor Government. A process began to retrieve the State's money and so began the most challenging period in Balfours' long history.

Vanilla Slice

We like to think of the Vanilla Slice as an Aussie classic, but it was most likely invented (in its current form at least) in Britain. Most food historians trace its history back to the French mille feuille (meaning a thousand leaves) which has multiple layers of pastry, but the Vanilla Slice is its own thing.

Somewhere along the way a baker simplified the mille feuille recipe, developing the cake we know and love today: two sheets of pastry, separated by thick vanilla custard, and topped with smooth icing. In Britain and New Zealand it's more often called a Custard Slice or Custard Square.

There's some controversy here in Australia about the icing and opinions seem to split on regional lines. In some states, the icing is traditionally pink. In others, it's white. Others favour passionfruit flavoured icing or white with chocolate ripples on top. Most sticklers for authenticity would dismiss the idea of simply dusting the top of the slice with icing sugar.

The Balfours Vanilla Slice follows the South Australian tradition of white icing, but adds a distinctive touch with a sprinkling of coconut. It was a late arrival in the range, appearing only in the mid-1960s, but has been a perennial favourite ever since.

The Kitchener Bun

The Kitchener Bun is a kind of donut without a hole. It's made from yeast dough, deep fried, with a creamy filling and dusted with sugar. It's named after Lord Kitchener, the British Field Marshal who was famous for his victories in colonial wars in Africa (and, in Australia, for ordering the execution of Breaker Morant).

Naming a cake after a war hero may seem a little random (although, after all, there is the Napoleon). But before World War I, Kitchener Buns were called Berliners. Known as Pfannkuchen in their native Germany, they no doubt they arrived in South Australia along with other traditional Prussian or German fare – among the many food traditions preserved in places like the Barossa Valley

During the war, when antipathy towards all things German even extended to food, no-one wanted to talk about Berliners. So they were given a more patriotic name. In these more enlightened times, Balfours have both Kitchener Buns and Berliners in the range. Today's Berliners are distinguished from Kitchener Buns by being iced and filled with either jam or custard.

Testing times

For more than 100 years Balfours had been one South Australia's most successful businesses, among Australia's largest bakeries and with a proud record of looking after its staff and its customers. What's more, the company had always been active in its support of the South Australian community, donating money and products for many worthy causes. Even when Australia lapsed into recession in the early 1990s – the recession the Treasurer, Paul Keating, said we “had to have” – Balfours continued to trade strongly.

But the bank was implacable in its crusade to improve its own balance sheet and the debt Balfours carried was cause for concern. Over the next few years, at management level, there were a series of changes. David Wauchope remained as Chairman of the Balfour Wauchope Board, but stepped down as Managing Director. Senior executives were employed with broad industry and retail experience. Among them was Max Dyason, formerly General Manager of Arnott's in South Australia and with a strong background in the food and beverage business.

Taking over as CEO, Dyason cast a critical eye over the previous export initiatives and concluded that they had enjoyed only limited success. It seems the Mexicana pie had failed to take the Japanese by storm. He was encouraged, however, by the fact that the company enjoyed a 70 per cent market share in South Australia. Under his leadership, new pie machines were installed to boost production capacity and efficiency and Balfours began a new drive into South Australian and Victorian supermarkets with a range of frozen and fresh pastry products.

It was a tough market. While Balfours had enjoyed relatively high profit margins in their traditional wholesale markets of small lunch shops, delis and canteens, the big supermarkets were looking for competitive price deals. The business model had to change, focussing on efficiencies in production. Inevitably, this meant changes to the product range.

One of the biggest changes was the demise of the labour-intensive decorating department. Balfours had always been famous for their special occasion cakes: birthday cakes, wedding cakes and cakes produced to order for corporate and community events. But by the early 1990s, the demand for such cakes had fallen away. Wedding cake orders fell from 7715 in 1982 to 733 in 1991. Birthday cakes suffered a similar decline. Employing a highly skilled team of decorators no longer made economic sense.

A review of the company's operations by accounting firm Price Waterhouse resulted in a reduction of the overall product range from around 1000 different lines to just 250. The iconic Balfours products remained, but many of the less popular block cakes and sponges disappeared. Work processes were restructured, to make better use of the existing machinery. But despite lengthy negotiations, a turnaround in profit and healthy sales, it wasn't enough to satisfy the company's creditors. In 1996, Balfours was placed in receivership. At 3.15pm on 15 July, David and Jan Balfour shook the hands of several employees and left the building.

So what happened to Balfours' staff? They just kept working. Although no longer a family company, the underlying strength of the business was its reputation and strong market share in South Australia. Letters of support arrived from suppliers, customers and the public. And almost immediately a buyer emerged. David Wauchope had previously rejected offers from international bakery businesses so it must have been some small comfort to him to find that the new owners, a consortium of businessmen, were largely (though not entirely) based in Australia.

Tracing the history of Balfours over the following ten years takes us on something of a roller coaster ride. There were great leaps forward. Freed from debt, the company was able to rescue the cash-strapped Sumners Country Bakery of Mount Torrens. And, in 1999, the long-awaited move into New South Wales began with the purchase of a bakery at Gosford on the central coast. In 2000, Balfours negotiated a contract to supply cakes under the Coles brand in New South Wales and Victoria and the Bakehouse range was launched in New South Wales with products transported from Adelaide.

But there were setbacks. The sale of the Glynde bakery in the fallout from the receivership had put an end to any export ambitions. Then, in 2000, the Howard Liberal government introduced the Goods and Services Tax (GST). It was a disaster for Balfours. The GST pushed up the price of pies and pasties, which had previously been tax free, while other competing product categories were less affected. Biscuits did not attract the new tax. Cakes did. And the way the GST was structured caused a cash-flow problem which, despite a healthy \$65 million annual turnover left the company vulnerable. This time it was a management buy-out that kept Balfours trading and the South Australian Government, loathe to see a local outfit in dire straits, announced a \$9 million funding package that would enable the manufacturing operation to move to new, modern premises.

With new optimism, Balfours was soon back on the acquisition trail, taking over bakeries in New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia. Closer to home, the company bought Bakeries of Australia, an amalgamation of local bakers Cowley's and Price's. This last move put Balfours back in the bread business.

But the most significant investment of all was the purchase in 2003 of Sydney's biggest bakery, Betabake, in the suburb of Milperra. At a stroke, the company boosted its turnover to more than \$100 million – double that of 2001. Today the Milperra bakery is Balfours' manufacturing hub in New South Wales.

Back in Adelaide, big changes were underway. In 2004, the bakery operations were relocated to Dudley Park, 15 minutes north of the city, in modern premises previously occupied by the mobile catering firm Golden Chef. By September, more than 40,000 pies per day were coming off the production line in the new factory. The city bakery was one of the last remaining manufacturing facilities within the Adelaide CBD and was sitting on a prime piece of real estate. It was a valuable asset, ripe for development, and the sale provided the business with valuable capital.

It was more than 140 years since James Calder had started making biscuits in Rundle Street and more than 130 years since the opening of his City Steam Biscuit Factory. The original

Twin Street factory had been a boxing gym, a pet supplies store, a music shop and a blues club. In 2004 it was still standing and operating as a live music venue but was to be demolished in 2012. The Cardwell Street factory, after changing hands several times, was long gone. Now Balfours' remaining connections with the city were to be severed.

In the same year the factory moved away, the café at 72 Rundle Mall closed. It was another sign of changing times, changing tastes and changing priorities. Today, any mention of Balfours Café triggers waves of nostalgia from baby-boomers who visited as children with their parents or grandparents. But as these same baby-boomers grew up, they turned their backs on the genteel charm of the old-style tea rooms. As a result, a scattered group of loosely-allied retail outlets, branded but not owned by Balfours, became the only company presence on the streets of Adelaide and nearby regional centres.

Despite unseating Vili's Pies as the preferred contractor for Aussie Stadium and the Sydney Cricket Ground, despite the immense goodwill towards the company in its home state, and despite (or perhaps because of) the many interstate acquisitions, the future for Balfours still looked rocky. The company had undergone more ownership changes, with investment and then purchase by publicly listed companies based in Sydney. But it soon became apparent that trying to build a national business by acquiring a series of family-owned companies was a flawed strategy. Again, debts mounted.

That's when another long-established South Australian company stepped in. In 2008, San Remo Macaroni became the new owners of both Balfours and Betabake. San Remo is a family-owned business, founded in 1936 in Adelaide by an Italian migrant, Luigi Crotti. Luigi was among many Italians who arrived in South Australia between the Wars. He started a store in Hindley Street, but by the late 1930s was a partner in a pasta-manufacturing business. After World War II he bought out his partner and, with his son Aldo, began to establish the family business. As Australians started to embrace pasta as an everyday meal option in the 1960s, San Remo was the first manufacturer to support and foster supermarket distribution.

San Remo understood the family background that had made Balfours such an integral part of South Australia. "The past 15 to 20 years of Balfours' 120-year history have been difficult, with the loss of family control and several subsequent ownership changes," a San Remo spokesman said in 2008. "We aim to utilise our experience and knowledge built over 70 years with San Remo. We are a family-owned company with a first-hand knowledge of the food industry and paths to market."

Now managed by the third generation of the Crotti family, San Remo is a successful manufacturer and exporter of pasta products, with a factory in the Adelaide suburb of Windsor Gardens and branches in every Australian state, as well as in New Zealand. In 2014, San Remo was inducted into the Family Business Australia Hall of Fame.

Backed by the experience and technical expertise of one of Australia's largest privately-owned food companies, it seems that the future of the frog cake, the square pie, the custard tart and the beloved Balfours chocolate donut is secure.

The croissant story

A Balfours newsletter of 1988 recounts a story that traces the origin of the croissant back to 1686 when the Ottoman Turks were besieging the city of Budapest.

The Turks were, so the story goes, digging underground passages to reach the centre of the town, intending to use them to enter and overrun the city.

However, a baker who was, as is the way with bakers, working through the early morning hours, heard the sounds of tunnelling and gave the alarm. As a result, the attackers were repulsed and the bakers became instant heroes.

As a reward, the bakers were granted the privilege of creating a special pastry in the shape of the crescent emblem on the Turkish flag to commemorate the victory.

It's a nice story. But according to the Oxford Companion to Food, it's a myth. The first known reference to the word was in 1863, the first recipe (for a completely different kind of pastry) was in 1891, and the first recipe for the modern croissant didn't appear until 1901.